

JESSUP
NEWTON FUESSLE



Class PZ.3

Book F952

Copyright N^o Ju

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

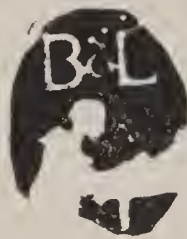
Copy 2

JESSUP

JESSUP

NEWTON FUESSLE

Author of "Gold Shod" and "The Flail"



BONI AND LIVERIGHT
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Copy 2

PZ3
F952
Ja
copy 2

Copyright, 1923, by
BONI AND LIVERIGHT, INC.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

00

APR -2 '23 ✓

© CIA704016

no 2

✓ R

To C.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

JESSUP, a sensitive, ambitious woman

HELMAN, a carpet weaver

MRS. HELMAN, his wife

TOM KEMPER, a youth

NORDAHL, a theatrical director

FRANZ SADNER, an orchestrator

IVAN BANNING, an architect

MRS. BANNING, his mother

DORIS BANNING, his sister

DANIEL J. MURRAY,	{ of the firm of Murray, Cooper & Banning
B. F. COOPER,	

CHARLES SALANT, a producing manager

A PHOTOGRAPHER

AN ART DEALER

HERBERT DODGE, a social nobody

THE ANCESTOR, a portrait

THE PICTURE OF A WOMAN

AN ARTIST

JESSUP

CHAPTER I

AGAINST one wall of the Helman kitchen stood an enormous built-in Dutch cupboard. Its multitude of shelves, bins, crannies and compartments was brooded over by a hospitable fragrance of ginger, nutmeg, vanilla, and brown sugar. It was one of those kitchens of elder days built for elbow-room and comfort. When coal-burning ranges had invaded the ancient domain of the open fireplace, the frugal, thrifty mistress of this kitchen had hired a mason to fill in the fireplace against wintry draughts, and had placed her range smack in front of the hearth. The walls were calcimined a dark blue and displayed calendars bearing the imprint of various merchants, insurance agents and banks of the town, which was located in the western part of the state of New York. On the floor lay odd strips and squares of rag carpet that revealed an amazing mixture of colors, for Helman was a carpet weaver, and even the halls and closets of the plain-looking frame house were generously equipped with examples of his cunning.

Mrs. Helman was standing at the old-fashioned granite sink, washing the supper dishes. She was an elderly woman, with a kindly, bulky face, and heavy

feet and hands. Her broad back and hips bespoke a lifetime of laborious lifting and stooping. She paused in her dishwashing, reached for a long-handled wire container filled with odds and ends of soap, and swished it about in the warm dishwater. Then she proceeded impassively with her washing.

"Jessup should help you with the work," said Helman, the weaver.

His wizened little figure was not blessed with the ample proportions of his wife. He wore a pair of deeply wrinkled bedroom slippers, baggy cotton trousers, and a funny-looking little coat. From his dingy teeth projected a short-stemmed briar pipe, and with a dingy finger he poked at its contents. The heavy blue tone of the kitchen walls had the effect of diminishing still further the meager pigment of his pale blue eyes. He had a grayish complexion, and a dry, persistent, bronchial cough.

"Jessup should help you with the work. What's she doing, anyway?"

"*Jes-sup!*" called Mrs. Helman.

Footsteps caused the floor of the girl's bedroom above the kitchen to creak.

"All right," came an agreeable, answering voice. "Just a minute."

"Where are you? Come down an' help your grandma!" piped the old fellow in a voice meant to be severe and authoritative. Having issued the order, he put on his spectacles and went poking into the sitting-room in search of the weekly edition of his Albany newspaper.

Descending footsteps presently sounded on the stairs. They were quick, light footsteps delivered by a pair of small and animated feet as unlike those of her grandmother at the sink as any pair could well be.

"I didn't know you had started," said Jessup cheerfully, entering the room.

"Didn't you hear me?" asked Mrs. Helman.

"No, I must have had my door shut," replied Jessup, taking a dish-towel from the cord behind the range, and reaching for some of the dishes that were stacked in the wire dripping-tray.

The girl appeared to be sixteen or seventeen. Her face had a more sensitive structure than those of either of her grandparents, and her coloring was extraordinarily fair. Her brooding eyes were almost purplish in color; her walnut eyebrows were untrained; and her dark, fine hair hung in a thick braid. The short, slight nose ended in nostrils that flared impulsively. Her teeth were bright and even, and her mouth was thoughtful. Her chin promised to mature into either stubbornness or charm. There was a simplicity about her inexpensive dress, and inherent good taste was disclosed by the absence of cheap finery. Her figure was lithe and slim and straight. Her immature hands were rather large and showed the bones of her wrists.

"Why did you put your hat on? Was you going out again?" inquired her grandmother.

"Just for a little walk."

"Who with?"

"Tom Kemper."

The old woman scraped some egg-stains from a

fork. Her bulky, red hands seemed entirely content to spend their lives in dishwater.

"Are you wiping them good?" she asked in a monotone.

"Yes, indeed," answered Jessup lightly.

"Use a little elbow-grease. I guess you'd rather sew, wouldn't you?" Mrs. Helman was thinking of the praiseworthy skill at needlework that Jessup had developed at the convent.

"I wouldn't want to sew for a living," was the prompt reply.

Mrs. Helman did not speak for a moment. Laborious thoughts were moving through her awkward brain.

"You shouldn't be so stuck up, Jessup," she said finally.

"I didn't know I was," returned Jessup agreeably.

A plate slipped from Jessup's fingers and crashed on the floor.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she exclaimed, chagrined. "I don't know what made me do that."

"You hadn't ought to be so careless," complained her grandmother. "That's one of our Sunday plates."

Jessup stooped and picked up the broken pieces in silence.

The grandmother said fretfully: "I'll finish wiping. You can empty the garbage."

Jessup drew a pail from under the sink with her foot.

"Pick it up. Don't be so dainty," said the old woman impatiently. Accustomed all her life to kitchen

drudgery, she viewed these evidences of Jessup's fastidiousness with concern.

The girl seized the pail and carried it out through the yard to the rank wooden garbage-box in the alley. She emptied it and then, fastening the wooden picket-gate behind her, started thoughtfully back to the house.

The smoky, goldish haze of a September twilight illuminated the quiet neighborhood. Asters of red and lavender grew in the dry soil of a small, round flower-bed. The vegetable garden was largely stripped; dry beanstalks clung to their props; a patch of potatoes showed signs of recent spading; the pungent smell of tomatoes came to Jessup's nostrils. There was a cherry tree in the yard and a few maples and ash. From their boughs issued a quiet autumnal rustling, a sort of chant of resignation. The voices of the trees reminded Jessup of the somber groves and towers of her convent. She had never been quite able to comprehend why her grandparents, who were Baptists, should have sent her to a convent. At any rate, she was through with it now, and in another week she was to take up fourth-year work in the local high school.

"Why don't you bring the pail in, Jessup?" called Mrs. Helman from the kitchen.

"I'm coming," called the girl. Her tone mingled impatience and indifference. Her mood this evening contained nebulous elements of revolt and resignation. She felt peculiarly restless. Intangible forebodings were troubling her.

"Bring me the pail!" called Mrs. Helman again.

Recalled from her reverie, Jessup skipped up the steps and into the kitchen.

"What was you doing out there?" asked the woman dully.

"Nothing."

"You don't keep your mind on your work any more. You ain't much of a help, are you?"

"There are some things I like better," said Jessup good-humoredly.

She began helping with the table, which was now being set for breakfast. The teaspoons were placed in their glass holder in the center, and the three plates were laid face downward, each in its place over its knife and fork. The supper crumbs brushed off the table-cloth, and the table set for the next meal, Mrs. Helman unfolded a somewhat smaller table-cloth and laid it over the top, Jessup assisting. Jessup was invariably a trifle depressed by the custom of keeping the table perpetually set. Its covered appearance always reminded her of a communion service.

"Don't stay out so late to-night," said the grandmother, covering a pan of biscuit dough.

"We were just going for a walk," replied the girl.

The woman hooked the screen-door, then asked: "Did you say it was that Kemper boy?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, just around. Where in goodness' name *could* we go in a town like this?" demanded Jessup.

"Ain't there a lawn social at the M. E. to-night?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I wouldn't go, anyway."

The front doorbell rang.

"I guess that's him," said Mrs. Helman.

Jessup took a final look at herself in the kitchen mirror, and started for the front of the house. As she passed, the weaver said, without taking his eyes from his paper:

"See that you don't stay out late to-night, Jessup."

"Of course, I won't. You all seem scared to death of a little walk. You'll leave the door unlocked for me, won't you, grandfather?"

Helman grunted an affirmative, and added: "We want you to be careful, Jessup."

"I will," she answered with annoyance, and was gone.

It was about ten o'clock when Jessup and her companion returned. The street was dark. There was a touch of coolness in the September air, and a smell of vegetables, and of dying grass. The locusts, which had chanted continuously all evening, seemed to have charged the air with a baffling, inexplicable note of reproach. An overwhelming depression filled the girl.

"What makes you so quiet?" asked the youth finally.

"I don't know. Am I?"

"You haven't said a word for about five minutes. Do you hate to go back to school? Is that it?"

"I don't know what it is," answered Jessup.

"Aw, that's no way to be. You want to cheer up."

"I'll be all right," said Jessup with an effort.

"Good night."

"Good night," said the youth. "See you to-morrow."

Jessup lingered for a moment in the front yard. A few half-dead leaves, fallen before their time, rustled crisply to the ground. The girl could feel the coolness of the earth through her shoes, and felt a sudden, unreasoning impulse to throw herself on the ground and give way to tears.

But the front door was thrown suddenly open, and Jessup saw the round-shouldered figure of her grandfather standing in the lamp-light.

"Is that you out there, Jessup?" he asked impatiently.

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Coming in."

"It's high time," said the carpet weaver. "Your grandma is worried."

"Worried? What about? It isn't so late."

"It's nearly midnight," was the surly answer. "And it's got to stop. I'll tell you that. Come in here, Jessup. You've got to have a talking to."

Helman led the way into the sitting-room. His bedroom slippers made a shuffling sound. The family clock tapped the hour of ten.

"You don't have to talk to her to-night," called Mrs. Helman from the bedroom. "It's so late."

"I'm going to talk to her to-night," answered Helman sternly. "Sit down," he said to Jessup. Although he himself remained standing, he was not at all an awe-inspiring figure in his funny little patched

coat and ridiculous trousers. But there was a look of unaccustomed severity in his pale blue eyes, and his complaining voice disclosed a threatening edge.

"Who was you out with?" he demanded.

"Tom Kemper. You knew I went out for a walk with him." Jessup looked at Helman with a puzzled and belligerent look.

"I don't want any back-talk now. Remember that."

Jessup's grandmother, apparently aware that the moment had come for proceedings of more than casual importance, entered in her felt slippers and flannel night-gown, and sank into her rocking-chair. Jessup looked inquiringly at her, but the old woman's eyes were averted.

"It's too late for a girl like you to be out. I don't like it," resumed Helman critically. "The first thing you know someone will get fresh with you. Do you hear?"

"Grandpa!" protested Jessup, straightening up and looking squarely into his pointed gaze.

"Your grandfather knows best," said Mrs. Helman.

"I'd like to know whatever put an idea like that into your heads?" demanded Jessup defensively.

"Never mind what put it in our heads," piped the carpet weaver. "I want this running around in the middle of the night to stop. Do you hear?"

Jessup was bewildered at the suddenness of the attack. There was a formality about it that hurt her deeply. "I don't think it's necessary to talk to me like this. Don't you think I've got any sense?"

The weaver came a step nearer. His grayish face

had grown a shade paler. He pointed a dingy finger at the girl and said:

"You've got to be careful, young lady!"

Jessup caught a vague, disturbing emphasis in his tone, something insinuating.

"I don't think that's fair," she retorted. Her bewilderment increased. She looked from her grandfather to her grandmother, and again the latter's eyes were averted.

"Was it fair, or wa'n't it?" demanded Helman, turning to his wife for support.

The woman nodded gravely.

"Don't you tell me I'm not fair with you. Do you hear?" said Helman to Jessup, whose eyes met the other's in silent challenge.

The carpet weaver stiffly began buttoning his short little coat over his funny-looking little stomach.

"Fair?" he went on. "I ain't never been anything but fair with you. Have I, ma?"

His wife shook her head.

"I tell you you need to be careful, Jessup. Extry careful. There's reasons for it. Reasons you don't know, Jessup." The weaver cast portentous eyes at his wife, whose only answer was a heavy sigh.

"Reasons?" demanded Jessup curiously. "What are they, I'd like to know? I'm sure I don't know what you're all talking about." Again she looked from one to the other.

Helman stood confronting the girl uneasily. He fidgeted with his buttons. He dreaded to go on.

When he spoke again, there was a whining quality in his voice.

"It ain't a nice thing to be a-talking about," he continued. "It's caused your grandma and I plenty of bad nights. I can tell you that, Jessup. An' don't you think we ain't prayed for you."

The girl looked at him sharply. "Prayed for me?" she inquired in tones that bit. "What for? What are you talking about?"

"That's why we sent you to the convent—for all that the neighbors thought it was a funny thing for a Baptist to be a-sending you down there to a Roman convent. It wasn't us that wanted it that way. It was your mother who wanted it. It was the last thing she kept askin'—for us to send you to a convent—to a Catholic convent. It was the training she wanted you to have, an' the influence, so that you'd be more protected an' looked after."

A faintness was creeping through Jessup's body. The color was leaving her face. She felt the pressure of some mysterious accusation sweeping in upon her from all sides. Her tongue and mouth were dry. Unable to frame a reply, she stood waiting.

"You see," continued the carpet weaver solemnly, "there's blood in you that ain't—that ain't all good."

The girl flinched involuntarily. She stood staring at her grandfather with incredulous eyes. Her breathing quickened and suddenly her voice returned.

"Who are you talking about? My father?" she burst out. "So that's it! So that's why none of you ever told me a word about him!"

She stopped as abruptly as she had begun, her outburst checked by a nervous little current of hysteria. She clenched her hands and stiffened her arms to regain control of herself. When she spoke again, her voice was low and her words came rapidly.

"Now that it's come up, there are a lot of things I want to know. I've got a right to know. I tell you I've got a right to know. You've kept it from me right along, and I won't have it any more. Do you hear? I won't have it any longer! I've got to know about my father. And you've got to tell me. I want to know who he was. Listen to me! Who was he? What did he do?"

The weaver recoiled before the dramatic tumult of questions. It left him speechless. He stood looking dumbly at Jessup's white face, at the burning intensity of her eyes.

"Answer me!" demanded the girl, her voice thickening into almost a choke.

"I can't answer you. I only wisht I could," said Helman tragically.

"We don't know, Jessup," quavered her grandmother. Her rocking-chair creaked mournfully as it swayed to and fro on the rag rug.

"You don't know?" echoed Jessup blankly. Then she turned with a sudden ferocity upon the weaver. "You don't know? Look here," she said in a quiet, inexorable voice, "I tell you I want to know. I've got to know, and you've got to tell me!" she said rapidly. "I don't know a thing about him. I've laid awake nights wondering. I've laid night after night thinking

everything under the sun. I don't know who he was or what he was. I tell you I can't stand it any longer. I've got to know!" Her voice grew louder. "I don't even know his name!" Her voice rose into a scream. "Why don't you tell me? Why don't you tell me?"

The old man was trembling. His face looked pinched and dusky. It was a moment before he could find his voice. "Be quiet, Jessup," he said hoarsely.

The old woman, rocking violently, was crying.

"I'll not be quiet! I'm going to know! I've got to know. Why do I go by the name of Helman? That's another thing I want to know. It's not my father's name. It's my mother's name. Why do I go by the name of Helman?"

The carpet weaver's face grew duskier. When he answered, his voice was muffled and husky.

"Listen," he said. "Your mother was a hard girl to manage. She was what you'd call wild. I don't know what it was about her. We couldn't do anything with her. Could we, mama?" Again he turned to his wife to confirm his words.

"It didn't seem like we could do anything with her," responded the other in gloomy lamentation.

"She run away from us," continued Helman. "She run away from home. It was a couple of years before we knew hide nor hair of where she was. Then we heard she was in St. Louis."

The old fellow's voice broke. There was a piteous look in his pale little eyes. A considerable portion of the misery of the whole world seemed to be lodged

there. He pronounced the words "St. Louis" as if there was something unclean about them.

Mrs. Helman was moaning.

When the weaver resumed, it was in a whisper. "It wa'n't that so much. We could of forgiven her for running off. It wa'n't that. It was the kind of a place she was found in."

Jessup looked in nervous bewilderment from the weaver to her grandmother. These incoherent statements only added to her confusion.

"What makes you both act so queer?" she questioned. "Where was my mother? What was she doing?"

The weaver's answer was sharp. "You're too young to hear about such things."

"You've got to tell me. You've got to tell me. I won't be put off any longer!"

Helman cowered before Jessup's demand. Seeing that there was no escape, he answered: "You see, she was wayward. She had her mind set on fancy clothes. We couldn't seem to manage her, could we, ma?"

"What did she do?" asked Jessup impatiently. "Where did she go? Who did she marry?"

"That's just it," said Helman with a groan. "She wasn't married. She went to a place that wasn't nice. A place that was wicked." He sent a terrified look toward the old woman. "A place too wicked to talk about."

It was Helman's tone almost more than his words that made Jessup understand. She gave a terrified start.

"It wa'n't our fault, was it, ma?" cried Helman, turning to his wife, who was sobbing loudly.

"Then who was my father? What kind of a man was he? What was his name? Where is he now?" asked Jessup hysterically.

"We don't know, Jessup. We don't know anything about him. He might be any one of a lot of men. I didn't want to tell you," pleaded Helman in a whining voice. "You hadn't ought to made me tell you."

Jessup's brain grew numb.

"I hadn't ought to told you," Helman kept saying in a stupid monotone. "But you dragged it out o' me. I guess the man, whoever it was, never even knew you was born."

Jessup's face was colorless.

"I hadn't ought to told you," mumbled Helman monotonously.

A red fog seemed to Jessup to have surrounded her, blinding and choking her. The floor seemed to give a plunge, but she was faintly conscious of groping through the kitchen and up the creaking stairs to her own room.

There she found herself finally, sitting on her bed in the dark. Outside her window, the leaves were chattering briskly in the rising wind, and after a while she could hear the grumbling of rain on the roof. The smell of the rain had a refreshing effect upon her, and she wondered what time of night it was. Through the thin floor she could hear the ticking of the kitchen

clock, and when it struck she was amazed to discover that it was only eleven o'clock; she seemed to have lived interminably since ten.

The darkness had a comforting effect; she felt that she could not have endured the presence of any light. The thought of sunlight was almost maddening. Even gaslight was unthinkable. Jessup felt as if she could not bear to look at herself again, and the thought of being seen again by her grandparents was revolting.

Her one thought was to get away. She knew she must go where she could be among strangers. She thought of her suitcase in the closet, of the articles to be packed in the suitcase, of the cotton umbrella with its doubtful joints, of the money in the bottom drawer of her bureau.

She inhaled deep, long breaths of the rainy air, and listened to the rain pounding the roof, and to the water streaming through the eaves trough. She remembered that there was a train that stopped at the station at a little after one o'clock. She had heard its bell many times at night. She did not know where the train went, but that did not matter; she had to get away.

She imagined herself creeping cautiously down the stairs with her bag and umbrella. She suspected that the creaking of the stairs would reverberate through the house and rouse its people, but perhaps the down-pour would keep the noise from being heard. She fancied herself crossing the kitchen with its familiar smells of cistern water, dish-cloths and stale tea. She would turn the key very quietly, unhook the screen

door, and let herself out. Then she would keep to the grass to avoid the sound of footsteps on the sidewalk, and hurry to the station. She remembered the smelly kerosene lamp in the station. Perhaps the train went to Buffalo, perhaps to Albany, or even to New York.

The thought of these places churned through Jessup's mind and brought to the surface a sediment of old dreams and longings. Her reveries had often presented remote, romantic visions of going to Buffalo, or Albany or New York. But to-night, facing realities instead, her speculations were pointed and practical. What could she do in Albany, or Buffalo, let alone in New York? How could she get along? Where could she stay?

The rain, driving against the roof, also drove question after question into Jessup's mind, ominous questions driven in with a hollow ring, and finding no solid inner walls of experience in which to imbed themselves. She discovered that her notions of a city were nebulous. For all her repeated dreams of going, she had the small town's inherent suspicion of the city. Haunting, inherited phantoms of suspicion and surmise pressed into her thoughts. Perhaps she had better wait awhile, better put off the departure until she was better prepared.

But instantly she dismissed that wavering alternative. She could not imagine herself sitting down to another breakfast with her grandparents. After what had happened to-night, she never wanted to see them again.

Surely she could make her way in the city. There must be something she could do. At least she would be able to find some sewing. Surely some dressmaker or milliner would give her work until she could prepare herself for something better. Maybe she could sing. And now, with a hint of an earlier radiance, an old idea rekindled—a longing for the stage. Born in a moment of restlessness and caprice, the dim idea had occasionally blossomed into sturdy petals, heavy with languorous and mysterious perfume.

To-night the gorgeous effulgence of the half-forgotten caprice began stealing luminously into Jessup's meditations. It began flooding her with a peculiar eagerness and expectancy. The old fitful, fugitive dream of making something of herself revived.

A golden mist seemed to be drifting out of the darkness and surrounding her with a velvety glamour. Her feeling of bitterness resolved itself into a thoughtful, conquering, little smile. She felt singularly unlike the Jessup of a moment ago. (More than twenty years before, in this house, and room, almost at this same hour, Jessup's mother had been carried away by the same vague but glamorous dream of becoming an actress.)

The spell of the resurrected ambition was enveloping Jessup in soft and comforting folds that were peculiarly soothing, yet subtly stimulating. Sanguine visions of fame, assembling themselves out of obscurity, were tracing enchanting images in her mind. She could hardly recognize the tall, proud image of herself. A distinguished, conquering image it was, of majestic

stature clothed in bright robes. With a prescient inner ear she could hear a rush of music. She seemed to be surrounded by lofty spaces; behind her was towering scenery. The music stopped and gave way to a tumult of applause. Jessup wondered if she was destined for grand opera.

An outcast, she would refuse to hide her face and be afraid of the world. She would straighten out her destiny into a daring lance. She felt reckless, formidable, and invincible.

Now she was listening again to the rain drumming the roof, and wondering whether the train was headed east or west. Perhaps she had better strike out first for St. Louis, and search for traces of her mother. Jessup felt a sudden morbid curiosity to see the town where she was born. She wondered with a shiver if the house she was born in was still standing. Maybe she could get some trace of her father. What kind of man could he have been?

Jessup heard the clock strike twelve, and realized that she would have to begin packing. The rain kept falling continuously. She would have to take the clumsy cotton umbrella that she had always hated to lug. Now she was making a mental inventory of the articles she meant to pack in her suitcase, and realized that it would not begin to hold them. Well, it would have to do; she had no other bag; she would send for her trunk later. She imagined herself writing for her trunk after she got settled somewhere. She would write briefly, formally, impersonally. Perhaps it would be better to telegraph; that would be

more businesslike and impressive and impersonal; yes, she would send a telegram for her trunk.

She foresaw that there was likely to be consternation in the house to-morrow when they discovered her absence. She could see Helman buttoning and unbuttoning his funny-looking coat. She could see him shaking his dingy finger into space, denouncing her as an ingrate. She could see her grandmother washing the breakfast dishes solemnly, her bulky face disturbed and sober. She imagined her people writing beseeching, perhaps threatening letters, insisting that she return. But she was determined never to see them again. They had tried, in their way, to be good to her, she supposed; but what had happened to-night left her no alternative but to escape.

Wondering if there were any matches in the box, she began to rise. But the floor gave a creak, and she became motionless. The rain seemed to be diminishing a little. If she waited awhile, perhaps the rain would stop, and she would not have to lug the umbrella. She listened intently. No, there was little prospect of the rain stopping. She shrank from starting out through the rain. And it was growing colder.

She still wondered which way the train was headed, and if she could get some sewing to do, and how she could contrive to get on the stage. Again her ambitious dreams were surrounding her with golden mists. . . .

At dawn Jessup was still seated on the edge of her bed.

CHAPTER II

ON a bland and sunny morning in April, more than five years later, Jessup stood at the rail of a Hudson River ferryboat. Its wheel was churning the green water into a brownish foam. Jessup's face was turned toward the solid crags and towering summits of New York's skyline. The sight of it almost took her breath away. Her hands tightened their hold on the rail. The immensity of the city gave her a sense of panic. The unexpected beauty of the spires and masonry of the downtown thicket of skyscrapers charged her with a strange, inexplicable terror. This astounding beauty that stabbed the sky seemed to condemn her for her own littleness and inconsequence. Slowly it began reviving her fugitive early dreams of high achievements. She remembered the rainy night when she had sat until dawn on the edge of her bed, drugged into inaction by her dreams. She thought of the drudging, sallow years she had spent in Buffalo. She was thankful that she had not married and sunk into still deeper and more stifling drudgeries, and was glad that she was here at last, at the gate of New York.

Already her brain seemed to be expanding into something of the dimensions of the dizzy heights ashore. There seemed to be a cruelty, a heartlessness, about those heights. And yet their spaciousness was

a challenge to the will to expand, a challenge to the imagination to flame. These towers and spires and incredible façades were resolving themselves into a sort of chant. She felt the force of a rhythmic lift. It addressed her in immense but unintelligible whisperings

The impassive, inscrutable spires and cornices and lofty roofs took on an air of unreality. There was a kind of freezing remoteness about them. Jessup could imagine herself pounding with bleeding knuckles at unyielding gates.

The crying of a baby finally broke in upon the spell and attracted Jessup's attention. A bare-headed, melancholy-eyed mother held the infant in her arms. She had the heavy hands and the rust-colored skin and the smell of a truck-gardener. She offered no comforting chatter, but only held her baby tightly in her muscular arms; and as Jessup stood looking at them, her thoughts wandered back over dim, distracting trails, and her face grew stern.

The fragility of seventeen no longer characterized Jessup's face. In its place was a thoughtful slenderness, lit by coloring of marked fairness. It was an interesting face, wide at the eyes, poised with an inquisitive eagerness, a changing face whose beauty deepened one moment and grew dimmer the next. The compact lines of her hat betrayed a flair for dress. Her inexpensive gray suit was gracefully fitted. She had done much of the work on it herself; she filled it smartly, and her carriage denoted a wistful independence.

Now her mood had changed, and she was gazing with curious interest at the smoking tugs, blunt ferries, and soaking old barges. The smell of salt water was foreign to her nostrils. The musty, jailish odor of the boat was a little sickening. A big Cunarder was moving slowly down the river, its decks alive with travelers. It was the first ocean liner Jessup had ever seen, and the muscles of her white neck tightened round a sudden lump.

The ferry began rolling in the wake of the liner, and presently lurched against the wooden side of the Twenty-third Street slip, making the wet, yielding beams and planks of the dock groan from the crash. Jessup, thrown against the rail, thought that the side of the boat had given way. She directed a quick look at a man who stood near her at the rail. But he must have been a seasoned commuter, for he did not appear in the least disturbed, and his equanimity reassured her.

The bell in the pilot-house tapped its signals to the engine-room, and the blunt wooden nose of the ferry slid with a moaning sigh into the curved matrix of the dock. The gangplank rattled into place, and the passengers were hurrying ashore. Among them only Jessup seemed to be in no special hurry. She grasped her wicker suitcase and moved forward with nervous diffidence.

Hardly had she reached the street when a taxi drew up in front of her. The driver reached for her bag and deposited it in the front of the car.

"Where to?" he demanded, noticing her uncertainty.

"Hotel Flanders," replied Jessup. She had seen the hotel's advertisements on billboards on the New Jersey meadows. She knew it was located somewhere in the theatrical district, and named it on the spur of the moment.

The car shot forward through the traffic-filled concourse and on into Twenty-third Street. The skies were blue and almost smokeless. In an ancient row of rooming-houses with drab lawns and iron fences, Jessup saw a sign bearing the name "Cornish Arms" and wondered what it meant. The car was grazing the sides of dusty street cars and motor trucks, and soon passed beneath the dark steel scaffolding of the elevated.

The roar and confusion were bewildering. Where were the glamour and gorgeousness with which her dreams had invested New York? It might have been better to have remained in Buffalo. But already Jessup felt separated from Buffalo by a great gulf of space and time. Already her life in Buffalo had receded into phantom years in which she had only been marking time against to-day's entrance into New York. What imperious, involuntary impulse had dragged her here? What indefinable currents in her blood and temperament had given her no rest until she had exchanged the known for the unknown?

The region of theaters and hotels now loomed before Jessup, and the names of familiar plays and players

at the theater entrances. She caught sight of pictures of stars in the lobbies. These names and images seemed to guard the theaters with singular jealousy. Jessup questioned if she could ever dig or climb or scheme her way past these intrenched personalities and annihilating names. What chance had she to clamber out of obscurity and drag herself into the stern regions of prominence and of light?

At the hotel she registered as "Miss Jessup." She hesitated for a moment as to where to register from, and then she wrote "New York."

"Room and bath?" asked the clerk.

"Yes."

"Four and a half dollars a day. Boy!"

Jessup concealed a gasp, but reflected that in a day or two, after she had a chance to get her bearings, she would find less expensive quarters, for at this rate her slender savings would not carry her far.

Her room was high up. Its mahoganies and white counterpane, its fresh rug, tall mirror, and French prints framed in strips of gilded wood, gave her a sense of luxurious appointment. She wished she could stay here indefinitely, but that was out of the question. Through the open window came the deep-toned rumble of New York. She stood regarding the roofs and lofty signs and solemn spires, outlined against the bland blue April sky, and wondered where and what she would be a week, a month, a year from now. She was conscious of alternating currents of fear and confidence. Now that she was here, her coming seemed at once foolhardy and yet inevitable. A stream of cir-

cumstance much stronger than her vacillating will seemed to have drawn her here. It seemed inexplicably fitting that she should be here. It seemed irrational and grotesque for her to have come, and yet it seemed inevitable.

An hour later, Jessup locked her door, descended to the lobby, and started out for a look at the city. Through the noon-day crowds that were now hurrying through the street, she drifted east, and presently found herself drawn into the vital currents of Fifth Avenue. She did not know the name of the avenue, but she felt an indescribable inner response. Its gray façades, its flower-boxes, the dwarf cedars at imposing entrances, the bright green busses, the brisk flood of motors, smartly groomed pedestrians, and proud dogs gave Jessup a sudden feeling of thankfulness that such a street as this existed.

The mesmerism of the gently sloping avenue made her feel like jumping up and down and barking like a dog. There was a subtle sorcery about it that gave her a pang of regret that she had not come here long ago. She held a grudge against the world that it had not informed her of what she was missing. It was igniting new ambitions in her and stirring up inchoate inklings of undreamed-of powers.

Every threshold seemed an inlet to adventure and romance. Back of massive marble columns she was aware of the vibration of beguiling interiors, of violet twilights and apricot dusks. The awnings of blue

and buff, the lamplit corridors, the spacious brocaded windows addressed her in incantatory syllables.

Hardly daring to look at the windows of the shops, Jessup pressed dreamily on, aware of a peculiar sense of expectation and enchantment. Little by little the spell of scarlet velvets, of gold and silver and carved woodwork, of voluptuous hangings and ravishing rugs, began to occupy her. Pearls and emeralds and lumps of jade beckoned to her from their casement lairs. Flasks of amber perfume made enchanting overtures to her imagination. Unimagined silks glimmered and glistened in bewitching folds, and almost caressed her skin with their soothing blandishments. She discovered satin footwear with smoldering buckles that made her own slender leather boots appear gruff and tawdry in comparison. There were paintings of honey-brown landscapes and of lovely women that assuaged her emotions like a flood of orchestral music.

The whole world seemed to have emptied its precious coffers into this lane of luminous windows. The caravans and ships of the mysterious East seemed to have poured their cargoes into this aisle of wonders. All of the regents and satraps and potentates of barter seemed to have assembled their massive tents along this avenue of granites and Italian marbles.

Jessup wandered on and on. Her temperament tingled to express something for which the somber, waiting years had been keying her up. There was a strange singing in her tissues, an aching restlessness to take her place in this effulgent city, and to become part of its rich chant. She had come to the right place.

There was no doubt of it any more. She seemed to have known and loved her new surroundings for ages. The morning's apprehensions no longer darkened her reveries. Invisible hands seemed to be dipping up goblets of the avenue's vital essence and pouring it into her veins.

An amber nimbus filled the sky. Nearer the earth it thickened into globes of orange light, and into the gushing froth of electric signboards. At the window of her room stood Jessup, gazing moodily out over the city. She had eaten a lonely luncheon, and a still lonelier dinner. Her first day in New York had tired her out. She wondered how many miles she had walked.

The puddles of reflected light on the pavements, the coursing gleam of the signs, and the mists that hung suspended in unearthly billows of color, seemed to cloud her vision, like a luminous dust. Lights everywhere, yet they seemed to her to cast no light. The shaded light in her room seemed to diffuse only a bewildering twilight. She removed the shade, then clapped it back on, for the glare of electricity was even worse than the muddy twilight. She thought of the warm, clean light of an oil-lamp, of the soft clean light of candles.

All day she had counted upon going to the theater to-night, on studying the acting, and imagining herself one of the players. But night had fallen and she was standing in utter listlessness at the window of her room. She realized that she had accomplished nothing all day.

She had drifted idly with the crowds and had basked aimlessly in the glamour of Fifth Avenue's windows.

"To-morrow I must get started," she was thinking. "I can't let another day go by. I mustn't. It seems an age since I've been in New York, and not a thing accomplished, absolutely nothing accomplished."

Then she burst out: "Oh, I feel like a lot of lightning! If I only knew where to strike!"

Reproachful thoughts wove and circled through her mind. She recalled her decision to leave the unbearable roof of the Helmans one rainy night years ago, and how dawn had found her still seated on the edge of her bed, filled with plans and inaction. She knew that now she must press her plans into action. She had no time to lose. But her resolution quickly brought its train of doubts and apprehensions. All day she had felt a growing sensitiveness about her clothes. The smartly-groomed women in motors and on the street, the cuts and twists and vogues displayed in a hundred windows had made her painfully aware of her own shortcomings. She was too acutely observant and critical to find a particle of comfort in the rapid comparisons of what was being worn and of what she herself possessed.

"I haven't anything but rags," she had said to herself in disgust many times during the day.

At first she had attributed the lingering inspection of a man's eyes to these discordant notes in her dress. But presently she realized that it was not that. She had perceived this look before. It was the same in New York as it was in Buffalo and Rochester and

Albany. There was a time when she had been afraid of it; but she wasn't any more. She had learned that men were not difficult to handle.

She felt a sudden weakness and nausea, a faint, speculative shudder. She thought of the autumn night on which Helman had blurted out the facts about her mother. She wondered how much of the traits of her mother had been transmitted to her. How much of that sinister origin had tracked her and clung?

A gloomy, crushing sense of bitterness weighed upon her. She kept pulling at her handkerchief until it tore. The sound of the tearing linen gave her nerves a sense of almost savage comfort. And presently she was swept by a relieving surge of self-pity. Tears welled into her eyes and she threw herself with a sob upon the bed.

In ten minutes Jessup's grief had spent itself. She threw the torn, wet fragments of her handkerchief to the floor, and exclaimed:

"Oh, shut up! Take a bath and go to sleep."

CHAPTER III

THE matinée seemed endless to Jessup; the September afternoon almost stifled her; and Broadway's heat rolled in rabid billows into the dressing-room, where it remained because there was no electric fan to repulse it. She had made seven changes of costume, and although the conductor had mercifully cut encores to the minimum, the finale found her smiling through gritted teeth and dancing to an audience no longer visible. A reddish mist surrounded her, broken by galloping points and patches of jetty black.

Willing herself not to faint, Jessup heard rather than saw the curtains closing.

"Hope that sweating crowd's got enough," said one of the show-girls. "Gee, how I hate matinées!"

"It's a nuisance to open in September," lamented another, kicking off a pair of gilt slippers.

"Just the same I'm glad I'm working," panted Jessup to herself. She was removing the grease-paint from her face and the beads from her eyelids with swabbing strokes of fingers coated with cold cream.

"Oh, of course. But there's no sense in such rotten weather," said a voice beside her, whose face shared with Jessup a broken make-up mirror. "New York's a frying pan in September. Never knew it to fail."

The breathless boudoir was filled with undressed

occupants. In print, the finest adjectives were lavished on their looks. Behind footlights and make-up, they were indubitably attractive. But here the enchantment bestowed by press agents and skillful stagecraft was wanting; the scene was now a chaos of limp, grumbling bodies, clouds of talcum powder, smears of deodorant, sticky hose and flimsy underwear.

"There goes that damn garter! Anyone got a safety pin?" wailed one of the beauties, near tears. But no one seemed to pay any attention to her appeal, and too weary to repeat it, she sat scratching her back with long strokes of her pointed fingernails.

"This do you any good?" said Jessup, offering a pin.

"Thanks awfully."

Through the thin partition that separated the room from the dressing quarters of the chorus men, filtered frank speech and weary oaths. An unschooled tenor burst into an Italian aria, violating it vocally and substituting foolish, brainless syllables for its words. A fretful voice growled at him to quit.

Jessup's dressing proceeded rapidly, and she was the first to issue from the stage-door.

"Cute little thing," observed the scratcher languidly.

"Too scrawny," commented another. "Funny way she does her hair."

Plain-spoken and unsparing comments on Jessup ensued.

"Meow!" came a yowl at length from the adjoining room.

A russet glow lay on Broadway's sidewalks. Tired eddies from the rivers of pedestrians were running into

drugstores and clotting in front of syrupy soda-fountains whose foaming taps did a lively business. A prematurely lighted electric signboard's lemon-colored blaze was almost invisible against the glare of the afternoon sun.

The titles of the various early-season productions were all familiar to Jessup. One by one she had kept track of their rehearsals and openings, had climbed hot stairs and waited in dingy anterooms of the managers to apply for a part, had seen week after week pass by and the theatrical season gain momentum, indifferent to her presence in New York. It was just four weeks ago to-day that Nordahl had singled her out from among a crowd of applicants and had told her to report for rehearsal at eight-thirty next morning at Bryant Hall.

As long as she lived she would never forget the weeks of daily rehearsals that followed. Every room in the big, gloomy, dusty building on Sixth Avenue rang during that feverish period with a continuous din of rehearsals. This humid hothouse inhaled its raw materials of men and women and scripts and scores, caused them to flower into the gorgeous professional petals and foliage of a new crop of musical shows, and exhaled them, richly nurtured and perfumed, into their appointed theaters for dress-rehearsal and opening nights. Like a weird, tropical hothouse, Bryant Hall had transformed its raw materials into luscious food for box-offices and into payrolls for players.

Seeing Nordahl, the war-horse of directors, in

action proved an amazing experience for Jessup. She liked his terse, testy, businesslike manner. She marveled at the man's monumental patience. His nerves seemed to be always near the breaking point, yet were always held in control. He spoke in a tense, quiet, sustained monotone. Every syllable issued with crisp, distinct emphasis. He was small in stature, and lean, and alert, and agile. But his agility seemed driven. Nordahl was the most tired-looking man Jessup could remember ever having seen. She wondered how he kept going. She marveled at the stream of unwaning vitality that kept passing from his small, tired frame to the pupils before him. His grayish eyes glowed and smoldered and chided his people for inattention to instructions. His small feet would suddenly flare into a new and complicated pattern of dance-steps, and then subside into weary immobility.

"My God, my God!" he would say in his unfailingly tense and subdued monotone. "You don't watch me. You don't listen to me. If you don't care, then give someone else a chance. A lot of people want to get in. I know. I know. They stop me on the street. They want to go to work. They want to get into this company. They know what I can do with this show. It's going to run a year on Broadway. I know. I know. I've been in this business a long time. If you don't want to work, give someone else a chance. All right. Let's try it again."

There was a fascination about the man's tired, serious voice, his courteous and persuasive chiding, his sexless eyes.

The peculiar sexlessness of Nordahl's eyes was a surprise to Jessup. She had been led to believe that all males connected with the management of a musical comedy comprised an amorous gentry ever alert for fresh adventures. It was a comfort to perceive that whatever others were still to be encountered in the dusky zone of the stage door, this director at least was animated by a zeal that was entirely professional.

During those breathless hours of rehearsal, Jessup marveled at the spontaneous ingenuity of the director's mind. While Bryant Hall shook and rang with the discordant din of a dozen pianos and the drum of a multitude of feet, the imperturbable Nordahl would invent incredible new steps, and trips, and curvets that at first seemed impossible to perform, but that evolved at length under his tenacious coaching into a finished and perfected number.

"Don't be so languid," he would plead with repressed intensity, but in a monotone keyed hardly higher than a whisper. "There's a lot of money invested in this piece. A lot of money. We've all got to work. We've got to work. It's hot. I know. I know. But we open in another week. We've got a lot to do. Some of you girls don't get enough sleep. You come down here and you can't work. It won't do. This dance isn't easy. It's something new. The house will go wild. You'll see. I can do it and I'm old. You're young. Why can't you? Come on. Let's try it again."

Little by little the pattern of complicated steps would evolve into a silken and seductive smoothness.

On the hot September day of the first matinée, the evening performance was danced and sung on an even more sweltering stage. But directly the final curtain had fallen, Nordahl issued orders for still another rehearsal. The authors had written a new song to brace a dreary passage of dialogue in the first act, and the producer had ordered the song to be inserted at once.

At the piano in the orchestra pit a group of men were conferring. The short, dark, authoritative-looking young man wearing a straw hat was Engberg, the composer. The sallow-faced blond was the conductor. And the grizzled one with hairy hands and ears, broad beaming face, and sensitive chin was Franz Sadner. Of the three, Sadner was the real personage. In musical comedy circles he was known as an orchestrator, an arranger. Outside of these inner circles, no one ever heard of him, for his name never appeared on the programs. And yet on his broad musical shoulders rested the bulk of responsibility for the finished beauty of most of the new music of the theaters.

In his long career, Sadner had literally orchestrated every number in hundreds of musical comedies. He was Broadway's uncrowned king of counterpoint. His genius enabled him to take the often fragmentary tunes suggested by composers, and to fashion them into haunting things of imperious popular appeal. For twenty years he had slaved incessantly over Broadway's melodies, wringing them into orchestral charm, shading, illuminating, and distinguishing them with his

musical sorcery. Over the groping, fugitive ideas of others he was slaving himself to death. In his plain little office in the center of the distractions and rush of the Rialto, he would shut his ears to the roar of the city, and bend his gifted inner ear over the music of new shows. At times he would work for forty-eight hours in a stretch without sleep in order to have a score ready for an opening. The producers knew that Sadner could be relied upon to bequeath upon it the desired touches of orchestral loveliness.

Jessup was wandering about among the half-dressed members of the chorus, waiting for the midnight rehearsal to begin. Now and then she heard Franz Sadner humming in a husky voice at the piano. She had heard him called the orchestrator, but she had no notion of the genius behind the friendly, rugged face that beamed even when it was near exhaustion. Jessup was frightfully tired too, but it refreshed and strengthened her to see Sadner in the group at the piano.

Nordahl darted in, and took stock of his chorus; he nervously rubbed his forehead; his lambent feet began thoughtfully outlining the steps of a new dance-pattern on the floor.

"All right," he began rapidly. "Let's try something like this. I don't know why they spring it on us now. My God, they shouldn't do it. They should have thought of it before. That's the trouble with an author. But there's nothing else for us to do. We've got to add a new number."

Later, while Nordahl's eyes ran wearily along the

row of dancing feet, a look of pain crossed his face, and his palms came together with a thump.

"No, that's not it at all," he interrupted. "You don't follow me. You don't pay attention. Miss Jessup," he added abruptly.

Jessup thought she was about to be reprimanded.

"Come here, Miss Jessup," said Nordahl.

She obeyed.

"You're the only one who watched me," he continued. "But you added some steps of your own. They're all right. I like them. I think they'll go. Let me see you do it again."

Jessup repeated the steps.

"Again, please. I want everybody to watch you."

Once more Jessup executed the steps.

"All right. Now let me see the rest of you do it," said the director.

During the remainder of the rehearsal, Jessup worked without any of the weariness with which she had started. Nordahl's recognition had revived her confidence. She felt that she was making progress. Her sense of doubt and mediocrity receded before a feeling of energetic reassurance. She felt less uncertainty as to her chances to hang on.

As usual, Jessup left the theater alone. She had established no particular friendships with any of the women of the company; and while a few of the chorus men had shown signs of interest, she had maintained an air of reserve. To-night, by the time the rehearsal was over, the crowds in the streets had thinned out,

while the torrents of light that billowed through Broadway had begun to diminish in volume. The electric signboards of most of the theaters had been quenched for the night, and the titles were only dimly visible, outlined by unlighted globes.

For the first time since Jessup's inconspicuous début in theatrical life, she felt like an accepted part of its feverish velocity. The sense of precarious uncertainty with which she had been clinging to its fringes had left her when Nordahl had singled her out.

She heard brisk, familiar footsteps behind her.

"Good night, Miss Jessup," said Nordahl, and quickly disappeared around a corner.

Night-faring taxis were humming through the streets, and several times Jessup caught sight of occupants embracing. Once an enormous touring car droned by, filled with laughing blacks. She noticed that they were sportily dressed, and jeweled; the women's dark cheeks glowed with rouge. The sensuous load rolled mysteriously toward Eighth Avenue.

In sharp contrast, romantic-looking groups were entering the foyer of the Little Club. Jessup felt her curiosity welling up with an involuntary rush. The clustered lights of a lobby, or a mysterious entrance, or the sudden appearance of an awing town-car would send a challenge through her. Waves of faint, seductive perfumes would come to her, and she would feel herself poised on the verge of mythical adventures.

Jessup was hungry after to-night's rehearsal. She longed for something better than the metal chairs, plain tables, and thick cups of the lunchroom where she

often stopped for a bite to eat at night. She was tempted to drop in at Shanley's, or at Claridge's. She craved softly cushioned benches, smooth and heavy linens, thick rugs, dainty china, interesting people. She wondered where men like Nordahl, and the composer, and the orchestrator ate their suppers. She had a curiosity to sit in a corner and watch them.

She thought of the suppers and parties that must be in progress in New York to-night. Remembered fragments of conversation overheard in the dressing-room at the theater drifted back to her. It seemed that every girl was hurrying to keep an appointment, and that she alone remained isolated, unsought, and uninvited.

From force of habit, Jessup entered the eating-house where the cups were thick and the coffee thin. She looked languidly at the soiled menu, and ordered. Her sandwich and coffee were brought, and she began eating indifferently. She felt lonelier and more isolated than at any time since she had come to New York. The people in the restaurant all seemed inferior and inconsequential. She studied her face in the cloudy mirror beside the table, and wondered if she looked like these people.

She had hardly begun her supper when she saw Sadner, the orchestrator, coming in. She was surprised. He noticed her looking at him, and must have remembered her vaguely, for he bowed with diffident indecision, took a table on the other side of the room, and soon was consuming a plate of Irish stew and large quantities of ketchup. Presently he ordered a second

cup of coffee, and, lost to his surroundings, began writing rapidly on the back of his menu.

Jessup watched with interest. She supposed that he was composing. It was romantic and surprising to her to discover the musician at work in the midst of a meal. She had hazy, ambiguous notions of melodies thronging his mind and finding their way to the scrap of greasy paper. His face grew meditative. She kept watching him with furtive and persistent interest, imagining staves and clefs and jumpy notes appearing enigmatically on the food-stained bill of fare.

Following Sadner's example, Jessup was soon rummaging through her bag for a pencil. She reflected that it must be fascinating to be able to write the tunes that ran through one's head. She wondered if she had any talent for that sort of thing. She drew the lines of a staff and began jotting down notes, but smiled at her own absurdity, and idly began sketching the costume she wore in the finale. Then the whim seized her to improve upon it, and she added sundry ribbons, and sashes, and gay flounces.

Sadner rose, paid his reckoning at the desk, and disappeared. Jessup soon followed. On her way to the cashier's desk, she passed close to the table where he had sat, and glanced at the sheet of paper on which he had been writing. But instead of the expected notes, she discovered a column of figures. But she did not know that the perplexed, scribbled sums disclosed the financial agonies of this genius who was measurably responsible for many of the biggest successes on Broadway. The perplexed sums he had jotted down

while he worriedly ate his Irish stew, represented a hopeless effort to pay an accumulation of bills for rent, clothes, laundry, taxis, electric light, and books. She did not know that the producers paid him only a pittance for his labors, for Broadway was to Jessup still the street of gracious rewards.

CHAPTER IV

NIGHT after night, Broadway continued to take Jessup into its feverish arms, to crush a little more of the youth out of her, and to send her back with a limp body and a bewildered mind to her rooming-house in West Fifty-fifth Street. There were times, when she was approaching the glare of the innumerable lights from the dimness of the neighborhood in which she lived, that Broadway seemed to her to have all the monumental garishness of an entrance to Hell.

Often Jessup could hardly drive herself on. The convulsions of the immense unsubstantial crags and summits of light, plunging and soaring, impressed her as the settings in a drama incomparably more important than anything on Broadway's multitude of stages. It was an impression of something ominous and overpowering. This overwhelming trench of theaters thickened the air with mists of murky gold that blinded and stupefied her. She felt like a marionette, and the crowds about her seemed to be pulled and moved by imperceptible strings.

Once, after another long night rehearsal, when on her way to her room through the darker and more tranquil Broadway of 2 a. m., the faint beginnings of an understanding of its confusions dawned upon her. Traces of an unaccustomed hush had descended; some of the corners were almost deserted; and in the

comparative quiet of the mild October night, she began to perceive something that she had not discerned before.

It no longer seemed to her that the eruptions of this immense crater were actuated by the desire to amuse, but that Broadway was energized and kept going by an imperious craving to express. The people who swarmed its stages, and the unseen armies that worked behind the scenes and in the music pits, and in studies and offices, together with the millions of spectators who passed through the front doors of the theaters, were impelled by this urge.

That urge, Jessup realized, was what had driven her here. But dancing and singing in the chorus were not what she had come for. She doubted whether declaiming lines was what she wanted. She did not know what she wanted. Occasionally she had fancied that it was marriage, children and a quiet home; but instantly that alternative had seemed intolerable. Again, she would fancy that she should let down the bars of her reserve and deliver herself into the pagan arms of living and enjoying. Her body often ached for release from the restraints that she imposed upon herself; and she had also observed that such scruples stood in the path of theatrical progress. But above all, she recognized that her restraint was in conflict with inherited impulses that rose at times into an almost ungovernable demand.

Forms and faces beheld for a moment in passing crowds would often cling with peculiar vividness, and

in time her loneliness in New York became occupied with remembered faces, and these evolved into curious, imaginary companionships. Ungovernable fantasies, centering round remembered features, would come to her in moody moments. Now and again she would take a pencil and attempt to draw a face that had impinged for a stirring moment upon her sight, and in time she found herself able to sketch certain likenesses with gratifying results.

The memory of expressive dresses seen on the street or in the lobbies of hotels would hover for days in her mind, and again she would try to record them. Sketching became an absorbing pastime; and one Sunday, on a subway trip to Bronx Park, Jessup's newspaper became an unseen sketch-book, as she drew casual character studies of a dozen or more of the passengers.

One evening at the theater, dressed well in advance of the call for the opening chorus, she sketched the profile of one of the show-girls making-up before the mirror. Jessup was working on a newspaper with an eyebrow pencil, and was so wrapped up in the effort that she was unaware of one of the girls watching her attentively from behind.

"Where did you learn to draw?" drawled the observer.

Jessup added some finishing touches. "Does it look anything like her?"

"Natural as life. Honest to God it does. Look here, Vic. Here's a picture of you."

"Who? Me?" asked Jessup's subject, a hoyden of

twenty, with bobbed hair of pecan-brown, a retroussé nose, short upper lip, and baby eyes.

"Sure. You didn't know you were sitting for a portrait, did you?"

"Let's see it, Jessup."

Jessup handed Vic the newspaper.

"Well, what do you know?" drawled Vic, her face beaming with delight. "You've got me dead to rights. You certainly have. I didn't know you were an artist. Where do you get that stuff? Does my nose turn up as much as that? Listen, can't you straighten it a little?"

"Don't you touch that nose!" exclaimed another. "It's just right. It's worth a million."

Vic insisted upon having the picture. She wanted to have some fun with it, she explained.

"Draw one of me, Jessup!" cried half a dozen voices at once.

Popularity descended upon Jessup, and for the next few days she was kept busy before and after performances and between acts, making sketches of her companions. She patiently yielded to the storm of requests; and, while some of the results were crudely amateurish, others displayed a shrewdness of observation and a knack for characterization that delighted her sitters.

Later on in the season, the press-agent discovered what Jessup was doing, and conceived an idea for a novel stroke of publicity. He collected her sketches of the girls of the ensemble, all drawn on newspaper pages with an eyebrow pencil; and a few weeks later,

much to Jessup's astonishment, her efforts appeared as a half-page feature in a Sunday pictorial supplement.

This publicity brought a flood of patrons to the box-office, and a flock of unexpected and amusing letters to Jessup. Men invited her to dine with them. One novelty-hound of a hostess invited her to her home to sketch dinner guests. But Jessup, alarmed at the curious twist of popularity, declined. Her work seemed to her hopelessly incompetent. The press-agent, hearing of her refusal, was furious, but Jessup stood her ground stubbornly.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Here's a chance to grab off some real advertising. And you won't lift a finger."

"I could never go through with it," answered Jessup.

"Ah, certainly you could. These gold coast babies don't know good work from bad. It's a chance of your lifetime. And it means one hell of a lot to this show."

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

The young man glared at her exasperatedly.

"If you can make some marks on a piece of paper here, you can do it there!" he stormed.

"I refuse to make a fool of myself," contended Jessup.

"Anyone else would jump at the chance."

"But I tell you I can't draw. Any idiot could do as well. You had your nerve to put anything in the paper."

"Oh, my God, what's the use?" growled the infuri-

ated press-agent. "You ought to be fired out of this company."

"Perhaps I should."

"Ah, you're crazy, that's what you are!"

From this time on, despite the wheedling of her companions, Jessup steadily refused to make any more sketches. Only in the privacy of her lodgings did she occasionally continue her drawing.

The theatrical season dwindled with the approach of another summer, and early in May the closing notice was posted. Having providently laid away enough savings to tide herself through an inactive summer, Jessup waited for the start of another season. She spent a fortnight in a boarding-house in the Catskills, but was glad to get away from the gabble of its patrons, though only to return to the hot, dragging days and steamy nights of New York in midsummer.

Now and then she encountered some of the girls of the company. From them she heard the gossip about its members. The snub-nosed Vic had patched up her row with a manufacturer of women's wear, and had sailed with him for a month in France. Another was touring New England with a gay party of real estate men and show-girls. Others had fared less excitingly; their lack of savings had forced them for the summer into other callings. One was employed by a dentist. One was a manicure at a hotel. Several others were instructresses of dancing at cabarets, where they were nightly permitting yokels to ruin the dainty shoes provided by the management.

Toward the end of July, Jessup received a postcard from Nordahl, asking her to report the next day for rehearsals. Again the rehearsals were at Bryant Hall, where early-season companies were being coached by anxious, hard-driving directors. Nordahl seemed identically the same; he talked in the same precise, intense monotone; and the old watchfulness smoldered in his eyes. The same devitalizing air of a hothouse permeated the dusty building. It occurred to Jessup that she had let herself in for year after year of this deadly routine. Her last season's work had carried her no closer to anything better in the theater, and she seemed doomed to the silly treadmill of the chorus.

At the dress-rehearsal, she took one look at the costumes for the first act, and was disappointed.

"I feel like a cow in this dress," one girl was grumbling.

Jessup inspected her critically.

"They ought to put you in something like this," she said, taking a pencil, and sketching something of her notion as to how the other should be gowned. "Something lithe, like this. Much longer lines. Maybe more of a flare here. Something on this order in back. It would suit you so much better."

"That's more like it," agreed the other quickly. "This thing I've got on is a mess. I hate it. But in this game they can't pay any attention to personality. We're just hired as clothes-hangers."

"Here's what *she* should be wearing," continued Jessup, turning to another, and drawing as she talked. "Something very simple. Put her in something de-

mure, and the effect would be startling. Like this—and this. Why, she's got a regular Madonna face. She shouldn't bob her hair; it spoils the whole effect. She needs something modest and concealing."

Several of Jessup's impulsive designs reached Nordahl. Some of her criticisms were repeated to him.

"Our designers have costumed our shows for years," he answered. "They ought to know what they're doing. They're good. Everybody wants them. They know what the public likes. But let me look at those sketches. Who made them?"

"Jessup," was the answer.

"Miss Jessup? Is that so? She's got some ideas. But they're crude. They're crudely expressed."

Nordahl stuck the sketches in his pocket, and proceeded with his rehearsal. When it was over he beckoned to Jessup.

"Miss Jessup," he began, "you've sketched some costumes. That's all right. We don't object to criticism. We've got to make it the best show we know how. Some of these people never have an idea in their heads. They're like a lot of dolls. They don't think. Your sketches are crude. But you've got an idea. I'll take it up with our designers. If they can develop it, we'll pay for it. We'll pay you for your ideas. That's what we want."

Jessup thanked him.

Nordahl stood rubbing his forehead. "You're talented," he added. "I can see that. You ought to study. You ought to take a course at an art school."

It was the second time that Broadway's austere

director had singled Jessup out for commendation. It was nearly a year since he had complimented her for her dance steps, and she had never forgotten the thrill of satisfaction. It had given her a sense of identity and of security in the midst of the bewildering turmoil of Broadway nights.

CHAPTER V

AN engrossing world of color and line and surfaces opened up to Jessup when she matriculated the following month at the art school. Again and again during the first few weeks she sat at her easel with a sense of familiarity that made it difficult to realize that her life had not been consciously pointed in this direction for a long time. And yet, it had not entered her mind until Nordahl had made the suggestion.

Her double activities were taxing but engaging, for she was now spending three to four hours a day at school, and was carrying on her work at the theater as well. When matinées compelled her to cut classes, she did so with a feeling of loss and regret. In March, when the company closed its New York run and opened in Boston, Jessup withdrew from it rather than interrupt her studies.

In the tranquil atmosphere of the classrooms and studios, she could feel herself expanding. For the first time since coming to New York it seemed to her that she had found something that she had been groping for. The life classes filled her with an eagerness. The faint, grinding swish of her charcoal on drawing paper sent a wave of nervous satisfaction through her fingertips. She had a curious, comforting feeling of standing at last on appointed ground.

Once, pausing at her side, an instructor asked: "Where did you study art before you came here?"

"Nowhere," she replied.

"That's good work you're doing," he continued. "But you'll have to look out for your proportions." He closed one eye and made some rapid measurements with his pencil. "The model's not nearly so tall as you're making her."

"But wouldn't it be wonderful if she were?" asked Jessup.

"I shouldn't try for any of those grotesque effects. You know, this is a life class, not a class in covers for *Vanity Fair*," he warned.

Nurtured and disciplined by her studies, Jessup's bent for sketching the faces of strangers continued to engage her, and in time it took a course that kindled her curiosity and filled her with the smoke of disturbing speculations. Scanning the faces of older men, eliminating some, and fixing upon others for studious portrayal, she was searching their lineaments for subtle stamps of temperament and identity. This hunt became a secret and insatiable passion with her. Her restless eyes would linger for wondering moments on distinguished features at the windows of clubs, in boxes at the theater, in the tonneaux of motors, in shops and on the sidewalks. She was always in search of faces of older men.

Jessup, who was now twenty-two, had concluded that her father, if he was living, must be somewhere between forty and sixty, probably between forty and

fifty. There was something strained and sinister to her about the word "father." Its disquieting cadence beat through her mind with an ominous rhythm, leaving a trail of sullenness and hostility, and often a track of consuming curiosity.

The knowledge of her origin had established a subconscious bed of soil, a continuous breeding place for distressing images. In moments of depression, Jessup would be suddenly confronted by disturbing conceptions of what manner of man her father might have been. But in more rational and analytic moods, she would endeavor to construct an idea of her father out of the confusing materials of her own personality, dismissing the traits that she knew belonged to the Helmans, and assorting and coördinating the remaining phases and impulses of her being.

She fancied that her sense of beauty and discrimination, her repugnance for the tawdry, and her impatience with the obvious, must be a heritage from her father. The persistent feeling of familiarity with which she had wandered about these magnetic streets from the beginning, and the diligence with which she had attacked her work in the theater and now at art school—these elements of herself seemed hardly to have emanated from the plodding, provincial Helmans.

And yet what did she really know about her mother, and the wild venturing that had uprooted her from her own soil, and blown her away, a helpless shred of rebellion and of passion, to a garish life and youthful death? What traits of her own, after all, could she attribute to her mother, and which to her father? And

so, when almost convinced that she had at last succeeded in discovering and isolating some definite paternal characteristics, she would promptly be thrown back into uncertainty and confusion.

One bright October afternoon, Jessup left the art school and started toward Carnegie Hall to buy a ticket for a Sunday afternoon concert. For once she was not alone.

Ivan Banning was her companion. He was an architect whom she had met several times through Doris Banning, his sister, a student at the same school. He had an air of the aloofness which is perhaps more characteristic of young Englishmen than of Americans. It may have been native to him; or it may have been the effect of three or four years' residence abroad.

Banning was rather taller than most of the men Jessup knew. His gray eyes were thoughtful and observant; and good-humored outlines marked off the mouth and chin. His shoulders were slightly stooped, but the effect, instead of suggesting indolence, was subtly ingratiating. Jessup fancied that he was about thirty. She perceived a leisurely quality in him that differed essentially from the nervous rush that characterized Broadway. But Banning's gait and speech were leisurely without appearing lazy. There were no evidences of drive or pressure. He seemed to have all the time in the world; he seemed a stranger to worry and to strain; and it was restful to Jessup to be with him. Banning impressed her as a representative

of a world that was sure of itself, sure of its station, sure of its past and future.

"Where would you like to sit?" he asked as they entered the lobby.

"Near the center, well back, on the main floor," said Jessup, attempting to give him the money.

"Please," objected Banning. "One ticket or two?"

"One."

Banning moved slowly forward with the line before the box-office, and soon rejoined Jessup.

"I think you will like this location," he said.

"But you bought *two* tickets," replied Jessup.

"Yes. I'm going to take the liberty of taking you to this concert, if I may."

"That will be charming."

Banning pocketed the tickets, and said: "I'd like nothing better. I'll call for you at three next Sunday. Where shall I find you?"

Jessup gave him her address.

Leaving Carnegie Hall together, they joined the brisk currents of pedestrians that the autumnal migration was sending back into town after a summer at sea, on beaches, and on mountain-flanks. The dazzle of summer had mellowed into a golden atmospheric quality that seemed to cover the sidewalks and buildings with a powdery haze.

The companion at her side gave Jessup an unaccustomed sense of being looked after. It seemed to her now for the first time that it mattered a little to New York that she was here. The man beside her seemed to symbolize a phase of the city which had hitherto

eluded her. His ease of manner, self-possession and quiet civility were markedly unlike the straining tension of Broadway. Here was a courtesy and charm that seemed born of generations of gentle families. It suggested substantial residences, and spacious rooms with the portraits of ancestors on their walls.

Jessup felt a peculiar timidity and embarrassment; she felt that she was touching elbows with a life and traditions remote from her own. She was attended by a sense of intrusion that troubled her one moment and gratified her the next. In this mood Broadway seemed intolerable, as if an enormous spoon had skimmed up the scum of the world and thrown it on the sidewalks in front of the theaters.

Banning, as if aware of the direction of her thoughts, was remarking: "Your play seems to be having a famous run. It keeps packing the house. You're ambitious, doing both these things at the same time. Doesn't it exhaust you?"

Jessup laughed. "I wish I could live a dozen different lives."

"What would they be?"

"I don't know. A month or two ago it hadn't occurred to me to study drawing. Now I hate to have to cut a class."

"Don't you find it a grind?" asked Banning.

"Not at all. It's fun."

"You're fortunate."

"Perhaps it's just my curiosity," answered Jessup. "I seem to be insatiably curious. People brush past me on the street, and I'm on edge with curiosity to

know all about them." Jessup stopped abruptly. "That sounds absurd, doesn't it?" she added.

"On the contrary," returned Banning. "It sounds delightfully rational. Whom are you curious about?"

"Oh, everybody. Never a day passes but I wonder what it must be like to be a surgeon, a lawyer, the captain of a ship, the owner of a great big store. I'd like to dwindle into a speck, and crawl inside of them, and find out about their lives. There's something so mysterious about important men."

"But haven't women been brandished aloft as the world's eternal and unanswerable question-mark? What mystifies you so much about men?"

Jessup was silent for a moment. Then she said lightly: "Their egotism."

"You score," laughed Banning.

"That cold and detached egotism," continued Jessup. "A man can design a building, write a book, try a lawsuit, build a bridge, breed a child, and then forget it completely and turn to something else. He seems to shed his performances as completely as a snake sheds its skin."

Ivan Banning looked at Jessup as if to say: "By Jove, but we're very serious for a chorus lady." But he replied: "Speaking for architects, I should say that after one has designed a replica of an older millionaire's home for a new millionaire, or an atrocity of a skyscraper, one is justified in trying to forget the performance."

"Atrocity?" demanded Jessup. "They satisfy me so long as they're high."

Banning smiled.

"Architecture has dwindled from an art into an enterprise," he answered. "Why, there's nothing more anonymous on earth to-day. One new building after another goes up, but no one seems to know the name of the architect, or even care. Every other art has its critics. A new picture, a new book, a new play can cause a furore. Other artists rush to the attack and to the defense. The idea, the treatment, the technique, are discussed at the dinner table and on the lecture platform. But a new building is designed, turned over to the contractor, built, paid for, and people move in, and that's all. In the theater, you have your audience. You can always tell whether they like your work or don't. But this business of mine has become as impersonal as hod-carrying. You can name hundreds of poets and novelists whose books are in the public library, and dozens of painters whose work is in the Metropolitan Museum. But I doubt if you can name the architect of a single New York building."

"Stanford White," retorted Jessup.

"You prove my point," answered Banning. "His name is known, not because he was an architect, but because he was murdered. What I mean to say is that we'd have more beautiful and more distinctive buildings if architects were held accountable by a critical public opinion for their ideas and their development."

"I think you're right," said Jessup thoughtfully. "I realize what an impossible ignoramus I am."

"Not at all," protested Banning. "I didn't mean anything like that."

"I want to see some of your buildings," said Jessup.

"Mine? There aren't any. Oh, I've contributed to a good many jobs, of course. But these things are all collaborations. A dozen different men may have had a hand in the finished designs. But here, this is no time for a lot of shop-talk."

But Jessup had been listening hungrily. Banning's impulsive outburst pleased her singularly. She felt complimented. What he had said seemed somehow to have raised the level and deepened the course of their previous casual acquaintance. She felt less of the old necessity of being on guard. She was glad that he had kept the conversation away from the fringes of sex.

He took her to the concert the following Sunday; and then, when week after week passed without Jessup seeing or hearing from him, she concluded that she must have bored him insufferably. She imagined that he considered her ignorant, that he must have found her uninteresting compared with other women. She became disgusted with herself, and began to hate her work on Broadway with a resentment that drove her into furious concentration on her tasks at art school. She suspected that it was foolish to imagine a man of Banning's type to become much interested in her, and persuaded herself that it was ridiculous to give him any further thought.

About a month later, however, she received a note, asking if she would join him for supper some evening after the theater, and, if agreeable to her, to name the evening. Jessup's first impulse was to ignore the request entirely and thus to guard against possible em-

barrassment. Her second impulse was to reply with independence that she was too busy. Her next was to accept; she told him to come the following Tuesday. But no sooner had she posted her reply, than she was assailed by doubts as to the sense of seeing Banning again; and when she finally met him at the stage door, she did not know whether she was glad or disappointed that he had come.

"I saw the show," said Banning as they entered a taxi. "I liked it. You were delightful."

He had reserved a table at the Palais Royal, where the floor was crowded with dancers when they arrived. The big room was tented with silk, and lighted by enormous lamps. Perfumes, powder, and Turkish tobaccos filled the air with languid scents, through which the French horns and saxophones and strings pulsed with barbaric rhythm. The contents of pocket flasks were being freely transferred into highball glasses and cocktail goblets without any signs of secrecy, and loud peals of alcoholic laughter rang from numerous tables.

"Do you care for something to drink?" asked Banning. "Or are you in a mood to exercise your veto power?"

Jessup regarded the thin, silver flask, and replied: "I think I'll be tempted."

"It's pre-war Scotch," he explained. To the waiter he said: "Some ginger ale." Turning again to Jessup, he added: "I believe this place is amply protected against prohibition raids."

"Still, a raid would be exciting," said Jessup.

"Shall we finish this dance?"

Jessup rose.

"This can hardly be called dancing," said Banning as they pushed their way into the chaos of warm, scented bodies.

Jessup was glad to have found a dancing partner, and was comparing him with the other men all about them. She discovered women trailing glances after him, and occasionally encountered men's eyes lingering on her. It seemed ages since she had danced anywhere except on the stage.

The jazz ended abruptly; they returned to their table; and the stinging coolness of her highball added a new element to Jessup's unusual night. Looking at Ivan Banning, she wondered about his people, the home that had bred him, the lofty rooms with their ancestral portraits.

A grotesque, impressionistic picture of the dancers came to Jessup through half-shut eyes. It was a thick lather of motion, composed of a great variety of tempos and embraces. Receptive young things were held tightly grasped by older men as if this passionate contact with youth might actually help lengthen their own days. Slim white arms encircled all manner of male necks. Cheeks and ears were pressed like stethoscopes against men's lungs. Fingers were entwined in innumerable twists. There were shoulders of amazing whiteness, and shoulders of incredible dinginess; sprightly legs and languid ones; girls with blossoming cheeks and youths with a night-faring pallor. There were bodies finely keyed to the rhythm of the orchestra, and bodies as rhythmless as clay. The life-force

was manifesting itself in hundreds of differing steps and gaits and postures. Some of the dancers were as listless as shambling pedestrians, and some were pasted together with a procreant tension.

"Decadent stuff, isn't it?" remarked Banning.

Jessup, although she was not sure of the meaning of "decadent," agreed with him.

Now they were returning to their table, and Banning was explaining that he rarely danced, and Jessup was gratified to hear him say so.

"People don't dance any more," he complained when they were seated. "They just keep moving."

"Still, we couldn't very well go back to the minuet," said Jessup. "There are too many people, and not enough floor-space."

"It requires room to be graceful," said Banning. "The more civilization, the less room."

She looked from him to the tented room and surveyed the people at its many tables.

"Is it only my imagination," she asked, "or do most of the people in here look distorted and grotesque? It isn't only the way they dance; it's the way they look when they're sitting at a table. At that table over there, for instance. Don't they look like the inmates of an insane asylum?"

"You've described them," said Banning. "There is something uncanny about some of these faces. Poe could have taken that tableful of people and written a story about them."

"There's something creepy about it," continued Jessup. "Is it New York that does it?"

"It's the strain, the competition, the frightful disappointments. Do you know, I'm uncomfortable every time I do any work on the cornice of a high building. I'm uncomfortable, thinking of the despondent people who are destined sooner or later to jump off the roof or out of a window."

"Destined?" repeated Jessup.

"Yes, it seems so to me. Don't we do what we are compelled to do by the force of circumstances beyond our control?"

"I believe that," said Jessup thoughtfully. "Still, I should hate to think that you were driven over here to-night by some circumstantial monster that you couldn't resist."

Banning was quick to protest. "I'm here because I want to be," he said. "Still, I couldn't have stayed away even if I had tried."

"But you did stay away until I had all but forgotten you," interposed Jessup.

"My memory was not so short as that," answered Banning seriously. "I've been thinking about you more than I wanted to. Come on, let's dance."

Again they pushed their way into the crowd, and this time Banning held Jessup with an air of authority.

"I noticed to-night on the program that your name is just given as 'Miss Jessup,'" he said presently. "I like the simplicity of it. It's a genuine relief after some of the fancy nomenclature adopted so often for the stage."

"Do you like it?"

"It's distinctive. But it leaves me curious."

"Curious? What about?"

"The rest of your name."

"'Miss Jessup' seems quite enough," she answered.

"For some purposes perhaps," said Banning.

"Oh, I think it's good enough for all purposes."

"But I propose to call you by your first name."

"But I've dropped it. I haven't any."

"You're joking."

"Not at all," laughed Jessup. "I didn't like my first name, so I dropped it, and now I haven't any."

Banning looked at her in astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing."

"Then I'm not commonplace?"

"Decidedly not," declared Banning emphatically.

Jessup, disturbed by the direction of the conversation, and unable at the moment to extricate herself from its complications, lamely replied: "I'm glad you think so."

"You are delightfully original, Miss Jessup. Imagine a girl not liking her first name, dropping it, and going serenely through life without one. Now that I can't, I confess that I never in my life wanted so much to call anyone by her first name. I suppose I'll have to invent one."

"What satisfaction would that be?" protested Jessup.

"Tell me," said Banning, "did you acquire all this originality, or were you born with it?"

"Doubtless I was born with it."

"Your people must have been unusual," replied Banning, regarding her intently.

Jessup wanted to escape, but Banning's authoritative hold did not relax. She knew she should have had wits enough to steer a less embarrassing conversational course. She wondered what possessed him to persist, but she dared not betray any resentment.

"Your mother must have been charming," Banning was saying.

"She was considered so, I believe."

"And popular, no doubt."

"Too popular."

"I imagine she had a good deal of courage and initiative," said Banning speculatively.

Jessup forced herself to reply: "She was sometimes headstrong, they tell me."

"To the usual alarm of her family, of course."

"They never understood her," answered Jessup uncomfortably.

"Parents rarely do," returned Banning. "I hope you fared better with yours."

"I don't know how I fared with them. I was quite young when they died."

"Oh," said Banning sympathetically.

Jessup's thoughts took a long swing back through the past. She looked at Banning with a tinge of suspicion. She wondered why he had been questioning her so closely. She thought she would collapse if he asked her another question.

Mercifully, he had stopped, but it gave Jessup a chill to reflect that she had not prepared for just such an emergency. She resolved never to run such a risk again. She knew that she dared lose no time invent-

ing a plausible family background. It seemed to her that her voice and manner must have advertised her embarrassment. She realized that the time might come when she must disclose the truth to someone, but this was not the time and Ivan Banning was not the person.

"My own parents," Banning was saying, "lived to see me disappoint them in nearly all their hopes for me."

"Disappoint them?"

"Mother had her heart set on my taking clerical orders and leading a very pious life, while my father, who wore himself out at his legal practice, insisted on my going into the steel business of a remote relative and making money. Would you like me better if I were a fat manufacturer with gloomy offices in Pittsburgh?"

"I can't imagine you fat," said Jessup.

"Or a rich manufacturer?"

"In that case, I'd have had to rely entirely on my imagination, for I'd never have met you."

"Why not? This is one of the places they all come to. The Great White Way wasn't lit up for the poor."

"I wonder what it would be like to meet a millionaire?"

"I can trot some around," offered Banning. "No, I take that back. If I introduced any, they'd be sure to monopolize you."

"I shouldn't mind," she bantered.

"So you prefer that the monopoly should be held by someone other than myself?"

"How can I tell? I've seen so little of you."

"My mistake. I'm going to correct it. May I see you again to-morrow?"

"Twice in the same week? Too much gayety, I'm afraid," she parried.

"Then next Monday."

"Perhaps."

"I'll telephone."

Repeatedly Jessup saw Banning studying her. Once he said: "Do you know, you remind me of someone? I don't know who it is. It occurred to me the first time I saw you. I must have known some of your people."

"I hardly think so," Jessup answered hastily. "We lived in the western part of the state."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. You've mentioned that. Still, there's something persistently reminiscent about you. One minute I'm sure it's the quality of your voice, the next I think it's the expression around your mouth, and then again it's your laugh."

"Goodness, I hope you will never see me cry!" laughed Jessup.

"Except that in that case I'd have the pleasure of comforting you." Banning reached across the table for her hand. "The next time, let me try," he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE delightful novelty of having Banning to dance with, and of going with him to an occasional concert, for a drive with him in his car, or for an exhilarating wintry walk, gave Jessup singular satisfaction. While he made it obvious that he was interested, he had managed to keep their companionship comparatively free from the infiltration of sentimentality and from emotional tension. It was precisely the kind of friendship that Jessup craved. Under its amiable influence New York's ominous, forbidding, and threatening implications that had at first oppressed her, became subdued and less insistent. Looking back upon her early days in the city, she could not help wondering how she had endured the isolated struggle and maintained her courage.

One sunny day in November, early in the afternoon, she set out in search of an antique shop that she had heard of. It was located somewhere in Lexington Avenue, in a neighborhood entirely strange to her. She had little or no definite notion of what she was hunting—perhaps a vase, or table, or a pair of candlesticks; something that she could call her own and that would relieve the deadly and impersonal atmosphere of her furnished room.

She found the sequestered shop at length, but dis-

covered nothing that she felt like spending any money for. But she did find something that afternoon that arrested her interest and repaid her for the long walk. She discovered that portion of Twenty-seventh Street that lies between Lexington and Third Avenues. It was a pocket of New York unlike any of its multitudinous vestments that she had hitherto seen.

Here, remote from the theatrical glare of Broadway, she discovered an old house of gray brick that had been made over into a repertoire theater. A sign was inscribed "The Bramhall Play House," and in front of the theater was a tall iron fence. On one side was a red brick Italian restaurant with vines growing on its foreign-looking iron balcony, with a pleasant little patch of grass in a minute front yard, and on the other side was an industrious little establishment called the O. K. Sign Co., with sundry samples of its commercial lettering displayed in the window. Across the street, unknown to Jessup and doubtless also unknown to the sign company, in a modest studio with yellow curtains at its narrow windows, over a Turkish basement café, labored a gifted artist who was noted from one end of the country to the other for his lettering.

Jessup stood gazing at this quiet street. She liked its pale green flower-boxes, jade-colored window-frames, and old iron grilles. She discovered several trees that appeared to be growing bravely out of the very masonry of houses. Some of the red brick walls were so old that the surface of the brick was peeling away like the skin of a sun-burned face. There were funny-looking old shutters, once green, but dyed by

time into pigments that defied identification. Near by was an Armenian eating-house, noted for its sword-fish, served broiled red as a lobster, cut into squares, and stuck on a spit with alternating pieces of tomato.

In the mellow sun of the fall afternoon, Jessup beheld a street of charming tints and quaint walls. She stood looking at the gamboge yellows, tranquil reds, and aged violets, and thought it would be fascinating if she could find an inexpensive apartment in this block.

A sign, "Ye Old Times Company," caught her eye in front of a diminutive shop. She crossed to it, taking it for another antique dealer's place. But instead, she discovered an assortment of glass jars containing, according to their labels, such an amazing variety of things as crushed rye, cracked corn, whole wheat, malt, juniper berries, dried black grapes, Dalmatian cherries, pitted prunes, Turkish raisins, and apricots. There was a mystifying assortment of filter paper, corn sugar, charcoal, syphon holders, valves, plugs, and crown caps, aging kegs and alcohol testers, all identified by labels. As Jessup's glance roved from object to object, it began dawning on her what they were for, and then she imagined herself brewing hospitable beverages.

This carried her back to the kitchen of her grandmother, to the huge Dutch cupboard, and the familiar fragrance of cookies and fresh bread, of brown sugar, vanilla, nutmeg and allspice. For the first time in New York, Jessup felt homesick for the place in which

she had spent many hours. A desire for a kitchen of her own suddenly occupied her.

A few days later, Jessup paid a second visit to the same locality. She rang numerous doorbells, and made inquiries for apartments. The migratory essence of Manhattan had crept steadily into her blood, and vapors of restlessness and discontent with her present abode were forming insistently. The street in which she lived seemed unlike her; there was a sullen, beaten air about its rooming houses that seemed more and more at odds with the quality of her energy. The brown lifelessness of the walls, the dreary sameness of the entrances did not reflect the fervor that steamed in her veins and vitalized her tissues. It seemed to her a neighborhood with its back to the wall, ever weakly on the defensive, and watching day by day for Broadway's bits and crumbs to be blown in its direction.

But this new locality seemed to supply something of those elements that Jessup had lacked. Tucked away between Fourth Avenue's plunge of traffic and the East Side's polyglot congestion, it had all the fascination of the unexpected. On seeing it for the first time, she had felt a deep content, fancying that here was a place in which she could pursue her destiny more freely.

This idea kept growing, and when she finally engaged an unpretentious apartment, from whose windows she could see the Bramhall Play House, and took possession, she was pleasantly aware of shaking off retarding and stifling influences.

The longer journey to and from the theater and art school was not irksome. Always there was a fresh

delight in returning to her apartment in the quiet block. She liked to get her hands on the dishes in the kitchenette, or to curl up in the armchair and surrender to reveries.

She would wonder who had lived in this house before her, what kind of families and fortunes it had sheltered, what births and romances and deaths it had beheld. In her former room, morbid fears had often terrified her as she surveyed the gloomy walls and windows, imagining suicides putting an end to disheartened and broken careers. But here these fearful speculations did not attend her. She was reminded of tranquil lives and happier occupants.

One raw, rainy January afternoon, a taxi stopped in front of the house, and a man hurried in. Jessup had at last yielded to Ivan Banning's eagerness to have a look at her apartment, and in a moment he was surveying her and the living-room.

"A fireplace and everything!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "I think your place is perfect. How did you ever discover it?"

"I was prowling about in search of antiques," answered Jessup, "and this is what I found. Give me the umbrella. Take off your wet coat. You couldn't have picked a more wretched day to be out in."

"Hickory!" said Banning, going to the fire. "You're in luck. So am I, to be here. My only complaint is that you never let me come before."

"Stop complaining; sit down and light your pipe."

"Correct. Pipe smoke is the only kind that really

goes with hickory logs. Listen to that rain. If it turns to snow, we'll have an old-fashioned snowstorm."

"I hope it does," returned Jessup. "It seems ages since I've tramped through snow."

"We'll go together. New York's a picture when it's covered with snow. It looks like a different city. Give me a blizzard that roars and blusters. For all its competition, New York gets enervating, and a snowstorm is just what we need. Gives one something to resist."

Jessup sat musing. "There's something austere about a lot of snow," she replied. "It can't help but have a cleansing effect on a town like this. A spiritual cleansing, I mean. I don't know whether it ever snowed in Greece or not, but there's something about snow that puts me in mind of Greek tragedy. A bigness and loftiness."

Banning stopped smoking and looked at Jessup. "Every time you talk to me you surprise me," he said.

"Surprise you?"

"Yes, your ideas. Your slants. Your point of view on things. Every time I see you, you bash in the head the general notion that the primary equipment of a show girl is a pretty face and a vacant mind."

"That just shows that you're laboring under a wrong belief. Few show girls have only either pretty faces or vacant minds. There's a girl in our company who reads Andreyev in the original and who scoffs at George Moore as an intellectual lightweight."

Banning looked incredulous.

"Another is the wife of a professor at Columbia

University. She is a graduate of Barnard and has her heart set on playing Shakespeare."

"But what made her go in for musical comedy?" demanded Banning with interest.

"To prove to her husband that she takes her stage ambition seriously and actually means business."

"I suppose you are aiming at drama," said Banning.

Jessup hesitated. "I hardly know," she said, studying him. She was wondering what kind of showing he would have made, had he been compelled to stand up alone against the onslaught of New York. It was fortunate that he had been spared rebuffs, blows and humiliations, that he had been able to avoid the harsher contacts. He appeared too fine-grained for the world's indifference and roughness. She was grateful to know that he had been shielded, and these reflections brought a feeling of tenderness. Afraid that it might be visible in her eyes, she looked away.

"I had an idea that you might be figuring on going into drama," Banning was saying. "You seem more suited to it."

Jessup's reply escaped before she could check it. "Would you like it better if I were in drama?" she asked.

"I'd like you no matter where you were," he said.

"I didn't mean that," replied Jessup with sudden embarrassment. "What I was wondering was whether you think my being in musical comedy is a mistake."

"No doubt it's excellent training."

Jessup shrugged her shoulders. "Well, at least it

accustoms one to getting in and out of almost endless changes of costume in a hurry."

"Yes, I imagine you can dress for dinner in half the time it takes most women."

"That's one ordeal that I've been spared. I haven't had to dress for dinner in an age."

"That's a mistake," answered Banning. "You should be compelled to at frequent intervals. I'm going to see to it that you do."

"I wouldn't know how to act."

"Nonsense."

"Are you so impatient to see me in an acting part?"

"As to that, you are sure to give a distinguished account of yourself either on the stage or off. You are inherently an actress."

"Then you wouldn't advise me to try to get some illustrating to do? I'm getting more seriously interested in drawing all the time."

"Your career will take care of itself. Why, you're just a youngster."

"Do you think so?"

"Twenty?" asked Banning.

"And three."

"Now we're really beginning to get acquainted," said Banning with satisfaction. "Another time, perhaps, you will be willing to divulge a more closely guarded secret."

"What secret?"

"Your name. When I discover *what* Miss Jessup you are, I shall feel that I am able to report progress."

"Report progress? To whom?"

Banning's answer was not delayed. "To my mother, for one."

"To your mother?"

"Surely. I want her to meet you."

"I'd like to meet her, of course."

"You'd like each other," said Banning confidently.

"Doris has often spoken of you at home. Meant to have you up to dinner. Now that she has rushed off to Europe, and no telling how long she's going to stay, I'm going to have you up. The last time mother spoke of you, she wondered if you were by any chance related to the Howard Jessups of Buffalo."

Banning's last remark made the old uneasiness creep into Jessup's nerves; but it was with perfect self-possession that she lit a fresh cigarette.

"The Howard Jessups of Buffalo," she repeated thoughtfully. "It seems to me that I've heard of them. But we're not related. No, I'm sure we're not. We were the Jessups of St. Louis."

"St. Louis. That makes you almost a southerner," said Banning with interest.

"No, just plain middle-westerner," returned Jessup. "I don't suppose you've ever been in St. Louis?" she asked.

She knew that she was toying with a dangerous subject, but for the moment it fascinated her and made her reckless. She waited for Banning to reply, wishing that she had named some city farther west, perhaps Denver or San Francisco.

"No, I've never been out in that part of the country," he said.

His reply relieved her. She shrank from this necessity for falsehood, inevitable though it seemed.

"Did you like it out there?" Banning asked.

"I was carried out of St. Louis in the arms of my nurse, and I've never been back," answered Jessup, realizing that now that she had begun, there was no escape.

"Then of course you were too young to have had any very vivid impressions."

"All I know about St. Louis was what my grandfather told me," continued Jessup, thankful for the opportunity to interject at least a sentence of truth.

"When your company goes on the road, you'll probably play St. Louis, and that will give you a chance to visit the neighborhood in which you were born."

"I never felt much curiosity about it," returned Jessup.

"You'd find it engrossing to go exploring and to find the very house," added Banning.

At his words, a chill went through the listener. She feared that the color was leaving her face, and strove to appear unconcerned.

The rain, driven by a smartly blowing wind, was pounding the windows harder.

"This is a terrible night for you to have to go to the theater," said Banning, crossing to the window. "It's nearly six. I'll telephone for a taxi and we'll have dinner."

"Let's stay here," suggested Jessup, welcoming the change of topic. "I'll see what's left in the kitchenette."

"I didn't know you were so domestic."

"Oh, I'm a rank amateur when it comes to preparing a meal. But perhaps we can manage."

Jessup had gone to the kitchenette, and was taking an inventory. "There's some bread, coffee, cream, currant jelly, spaghetti, a can of salmon, and some crab-meat," she enumerated.

"It sounds like a shore dinner. And with the rain pounding on your windows like a surf, the illusion will be complete," said Banning.

Jessup put on an apron, and lit the gas.

"What may I do to help?" asked Banning diligently.

"You may fix the table. Draw it in front of the fire. Then you may put on another log."

"By Jove, I'm glad it's raining," answered Banning, following Jessup's instructions. "This is great."

"Don't brag too soon," warned Jessup. "Wait until you see if you get enough to eat. See if you can open this tin. Here's a can-opener. We'll have a Newburg. We'll set a new style. Newburg for dinner instead of for supper. Don't hurt yourself."

Banning paused in his labor. "If you'll be my nurse, I'll inflict a first-class gash, Miss Jessup."

"I'll have to wear everything to-night but a nurse's costume, so no heroics, please."

When they sat down, Jessup said: "Shore dinner, did you say? Too bad we haven't any steamed clams. I feel steamed myself after standing over that stove."

"You emulate the clam in only one respect."

"What's that?"

"Your secrecy about your name. This is the most

formal informal dinner I ever attended. I may set the table and open cans, but I have to address you as Miss Jessup."

"Then drop the 'Miss' and call me 'Jessup.' "

"No, I couldn't do that. It's too harsh," objected Banning. "Why won't you tell me your first name?"

"But I've dropped it and haven't any," protested Jessup.

"What's all the mystery, anyway?" demanded Banning with a note of impatience.

"There isn't any mystery. Some people use three or even four names. You content yourself with two. As for me, I am satisfied with one."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. *I'll* name you."

"Fine. What do you propose?"

"If I *propose*, it's got to be the name Banning," he answered promptly.

"Don't be ridiculous," retorted Jessup. "What name do you *suggest*?"

"Your name ought to be Gloria."

"Nonsense," scoffed Jessup. "Too flamboyant. It sounds like a sunset."

"Well, how about something plain, like Jane? Jane Jessup isn't so bad."

"No alliterations."

"What about Peg?"

"Too wooden."

"How do you like Victoria?"

"Mid-Victoria might do," she replied.

"No, that sounds like chaperons and prayer-books," objected Banning. "I have it. Diana! That's clas-

sical without being old-fashioned. That's refreshing. It has a bright, luminous quality like yourself. It's more like you than anything I can think of. It fits you exactly. It suggests the sun, the open, and all the graces of the pagan huntress."

"Fortune huntress?" asked Jessup.

"I can't imagine anything so trivial as a fortune interesting you," said Banning.

Now that he was able to address Jessup without the formality of the "Miss," their relations seemed spontaneously to have reached a new phase. Despite the artificiality of the structure upon which this new friendship rested, it was singularly gratifying to Jessup. She felt less hopelessly alone. She felt as if Banning's bestowal of another name upon her had severed one of the strings that tied her to events that she longed to forget. She felt subtly reassured and encouraged.

CHAPTER VII

ONE of the cruelties of Broadway is that it beckons and distracts multitudes who are totally unfitted for its requirements. But sometimes it discovers desirable qualities in those who have least expected to be wooed by its baffling spirit.

The more Jessup had seen of the theater, the less inclined she had often felt to remain part of it. Its superficial excitement had become more and more depressing to her. Despite Ivan Banning's protests to the contrary, she knew that he was not enthusiastic about her connection with the chorus, and this gave increasing impetus to her anxiety to be out of it.

One night, Jessup and a number of others of the chorus were instructed to remain at the theater to be tried out in some songs. One of the minor principals had been given notice of dismissal and her place had to be filled immediately. Dewart, the conductor, was at the piano; Charles Salant, the producer, with several of his assistants, was out in front.

"Try that again. Get some life into it but don't be so jumpy," growled Dewart when one of the girls had finished.

"Never mind, that'll do," interrupted the producer. "Don't have her sing it again. Try someone else."

Another was called, while Salant and his assistants listened critically. Salant was a clean-cut businesslike

man of thirty-eight. Unlike most of his associates, his manner was reserved and studious, and he rarely raised his voice or became excited. His hair and complexion were dark and his eyes alert but unmistakably moody. The backer of his various ventures was said to be one of the big New York merchants.

"Shall we try that again, Mr. Salant?" asked Dewart.

"That's enough. Who's next?"

"Miss Jessup!" called Dewart.

Jessup stepped to the front of the stage. She was quite familiar with the song, but her nervous eagerness led her to quicken the tempo.

"Here! Here!" cried the conductor. "That's not the time! Stick to the piano, can't you?"

The producer started toward the stage. "Let her sing it her own way," he said with interest.

Again Jessup began the song. Salant watched her closely, and then said to the conductor:

"That's more like it. That number has always been much too slow. It's been the one piece of cheese in the show. Let her sing it again," he said.

Again Jessup began, and this time, instead of attempting to adhere to the customary interpretation, she gave her own.

"You're getting some new twists into it," commented the owner, quick to notice the changes.

"It seems to me that's the way it ought to go," answered Jessup.

"I don't mind. I like the way you sing it. What do you think, Nordahl?" asked Salant.

"She's right. She's right. She's putting a new curve on the ball. The house will respond. You'll see," answered Nordahl with his unfailing intensity.

"Let her try the other song," said Salant.

"I'm afraid I don't know all the words," said Jessup with misgivings.

"Never mind the words. Hum it," replied Dewart.

With Dewart's assistance, she got through, and again there were comments of approval.

"That's good work, Miss Jessup," declared the owner. "The part is yours. You start in it next Monday night."

The following Monday, freshly costumed and duly coached for the part, Jessup made her début in the rôle. As to dialogue, it was only a bit, but the songs gave her a first opportunity to face an audience alone. Indifferent, however, to a prolonged career in musical comedy, she made her first entrance without the nervous fear that she would doubtless have felt, had she thought there was a great deal at stake. She displayed an easy naturalness, and as a result, she began introducing mannerisms that had not figured in the rehearsals.

The audience, quick to detect a subtle comedy quality, laughed at lines that had never previously provoked any mirth. Seasoned actors are usually ready to give their souls for a laugh; but Jessup was far from gratified. It was the first time that she had ever been laughed at by a theaterful of people, and she felt resentful and ashamed.

The leading man, delighted with her work, urged

her to keep it up. She did keep it up, drawing laugh upon laugh, and keying up what had once been dull moments in the performance, into animated and infectious episodes. Her first song brought a smart burst of applause; and the second, which came in the last act, was so enthusiastically received that Dewart promptly gave his orchestra the cue for an encore.

Salant rushed to her after her final exit, to offer his congratulations.

"It was a hit, girly, a hit!" said the owner, wringing both her hands. "I didn't know it was in you. You're all right. Keep it up and you'll be a success!"

But a little later, when Vic, of the chorus, returned to the dressing-room, she was amazed to find Jessup in tears.

"My dear! What on earth is the matter?" demanded the show-girl. "You're a perfect knock-out. You ought to be kicking a hole in the sky."

"I feel like crawling off somewhere and hiding. It makes me sick to be laughed at," answered Jessup.

"Why, you poor nut!" gasped the other, leaning weakly against the wall. "Laughed at? That's just exactly what you want. What did you expect them to do when you pulled the funny stuff?"

"I don't know what I expected," whimpered Jessup.

"My God, you don't seem to know what luck you're in, kid. Most girls have to sweat blood to get even a look at a chance like this. The men with the say-so usually want everything. You've got to sleep with 'em. You've got to belong to them!"

Jessup had been playing her new part for more than a week, before Ivan Banning had any intimation of it. He had been in Philadelphia for several days, and when on his return he telephoned Jessup, she said:

"Do you suppose you could stand it to see the show again?"

"I can stand it as long as you're in it," he replied.

"Drop in to-night, then, why don't you? I have a surprise for you."

"You have? I'll be there, Diana. How do you like your new name?"

"I like it if you do."

"I find myself writing it on newspapers, blotters, menus and telephone directories. I'm like a small boy with a new game. How have you been? All right?"

"Yes, thanks. And you?"

"I've been ridiculously busy. But it's comforting to reflect that if the grand rush keeps up, I'll be in a fair way to make some money."

Banning attended the performance that night. He arrived too late to look at the program, and was not aware of the change in cast until Jessup's first entrance, and at the end of the act he rushed out for a quantity of flowers and ordered them sent at once to her dressing-room.

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" he demanded when they were at supper.

"I had to let a decent time elapse to get my bearings. Every day during that first week I had visions of being ordered back into the chorus," answered Jessup.

Banning winced. "That would have been too bad," he said.

Jessup noticed it. As she studied him, she fancied that he could think cutting thoughts and say cutting things.

"I should never have suspected that you had such a flair for comedy," Banning was saying.

"Did I amuse you?" asked Jessup dryly.

"Very much."

"I didn't know either that I was a comédienne until my first night in this part. I went on, and all of a sudden I heard people laughing."

"I don't wonder. You are deliciously amusing. It must be a great satisfaction to you," replied Banning.

"I would hardly say so. A few minutes after I appeared in this part for the first time, I was crying."

"Crying?"

"Blubbering," stated Jessup.

"But why?"

"It seemed beastly to be laughed at. You know the kind of riff-raff there is in an audience. I must have intuitively dreaded it. Maybe it was just that dread that made me satisfied to be in the chorus. You know there's something impersonal about being in the chorus. One feels more protected. One is just part of the picture, like a chair or table, or piece of scenery."

Banning looked at her with deepened interest. "I am discovering new qualities to admire in you every time I see you," he said. "You really are adorable."

Jessup was invited soon afterwards to dine with

Banning and his mother. It was the first time she had been asked, and she suspected that if she had still been a member of the chorus, she would not have been invited now. She might have declined, but for a vigorous curiosity to meet Mrs. Banning, and because of the steadily advancing belief that she was falling in love with him.

The Bannings lived in a house in upper Lexington Avenue. There was an elegance, an air of an earlier day about its heavy oaks and walnuts, its paneled walls, and Jamaican butler.

Ivan's mother was a woman of about sixty. She was tall, heavy, and confidently poised, and her grayish face displayed a multitude of little wrinkles. Her eyes were large and blue and languid, as though they had viewed the world from numerous angles and found it rather a bore. Jessup felt defensive and on her guard.

"How do you do?" greeted Mrs. Banning. She extended her arm only from the elbow, and retained Jessup's hand for a moment, regarding her inspectively.

The home had a sombre dignity that impressed the visitor, but kept her ill at ease. These chairs which had been sat in for two or three generations of the Banning family seemed to be brooded over by the jealous ghosts of former occupants. Jessup had not been in the place for a quarter of an hour before she began to generate an uneasy resentment against old furniture. The family traditions that had enriched Ivan Banning's personality and background for her, now rose between them like interfering obstacles.

Recalling Ivan's remarks concerning his mother's

inquiry as to whether she was related to the Howard Jessups of Buffalo, Jessup had naturally anticipated further questioning at this time, and had taken the precaution of preparing plausible answers. It was at dinner that the expected inquiries politely began.

"Ivan has told me of your success on the stage," said Mrs. Banning.

"I'm afraid it's not a very conspicuous success," replied Jessup. "My part is only a small one."

"On the contrary," put in Ivan, "you make it very conspicuous. I want you to see her in it, mother."

"I go to the theater so seldom," sighed Mrs. Banning. "But I do want to see you. There was a time when I never missed an opening at the Empire. Especially the premières of John Drew. But I'm not so young as I once was, and it is becoming more and more of an effort for me to get to the theater. Is it true, my dear, that, as one of our younger critics has said, the most essential qualification for a stage career is to have had a grandmother who was an accomplished actress?"

"I suppose it would do no harm to have been born in the wings," answered Jessup.

"Fancy!" uttered Mrs. Banning, lifting her eyes with a critical look compounded of tolerance and sophistication.

"I don't believe there were ever any ancestors of mine on the stage," continued Jessup. "Doubtless they would be appropriately shocked if they should find me there."

Mrs. Banning looked more pleased. "It isn't the

easiest thing in the world for those of an older generation to appreciate the views of the younger. There was a time not so far back when parents actually objected to having their daughters become actresses."

"Unfortunately I was unable to consult mine," answered Jessup patiently. "I lost them both when I was very young."

"Indeed? I used to know some Jessups," said Mrs. Banning reflectively. "Are you by any chance related to the Howard Jessups of Buffalo?"

"Not to my knowledge," returned Jessup, glad that she had prepared herself for just this inquiry.

"They were splendid people," said the hostess. "We met them the first time on a Mediterranean cruise. Both Mr. and Mrs. Jessup were subsequently lost on the *Titanic*. I believe you said that Miss Jessup is a St. Louis girl?" she added, turning to her son.

"I was born there," said Jessup simply. "But I was very young when I left."

"Yes," said Mrs. Banning. "Did I get the impression that your father was a lawyer?" she asked, looking from Jessup to her son. "The law is such an interesting profession. My husband was a lawyer."

"My father was interested in grain," answered Jessup. "He owned a number of large elevators located out in Missouri and Kansas. He was very successful, but he lost heavily in the panic of 1893."

"Yes, I remember that panic only too well. It was a most unfortunate affair. Some of our friends lost everything. We, however, were the gainers that year. It was the year Ivan was born."

Ivan bowed. "Decent of you to put it that way," he replied. "Especially since I refused to go into the ministry."

"I have never stood in the way of self-determination on your part, Ivan. You have never really disappointed me. And I don't think you ever will."

Jessup gathered that Mrs. Banning's statement was a thrust at Ivan's interest in herself.

From her dinner with the Bannings, Jessup carried away the persistent impression that Ivan's mother disliked her. She felt like a lower form of life that had been curiously placed on a slide for inspection, like an insect that had been pushed and prodded and examined. The recollection of it made her furious. At times it left her vastly depressed and permeated with an embittered sense of inferiority that she was unable to combat. Again, she strove, for Ivan's sake, not to despise Mrs. Banning for her air of patronizing superiority.

By degrees, Mrs. Banning's lofty air seemed to resolve itself into an impersonal and oppressive symbol of society, judging her and condemning her. It seemed to Jessup as if a subtle enmity emanated in somber currents from established society wherever she chanced to touch it. This thought would often push through her mind at the theater, and would goad her into added efforts to conquer the indifference of the occupants of the boxes and to plunge them against their wills into laughter. And when they laughed, she would hate them for it, and would long for the day when she could

hurl her stage-trappings into a corner and never see them again.

Jessup recalled how she had hesitated to meet Mrs. Banning. A cloudy prescience seemed to have issued its warning, but she had been unable to translate the wavering impression into a definite understanding, and, as a result, she had advanced blindly into what had proved to be a danger-zone. It angered her that she had not been aware enough to foresee what might happen and thus to save herself from the sickening consequences.

Having committed the blunder, Jessup fell prey to embittered introspections that pursued her incessantly. She was denied the comfort of specific resentment against a tangible affront on the part of Ivan's mother. She had been wounded by unkindly intent, rather than by objective weapons, and it was this mode of veiled attack that left her bewildered and afraid. She reviewed her relations with Ivan, and was preyed upon by morbid suspicions and surmises. There were moments when her faith in him became hardened and roughened into doubts. Twice, when he telephoned, she put him off with pleas of being busy with other engagements. The third time he called up, he was importunate, declaring that he must see her at once, and obtained permission to go to her apartment.

Jessup received him with an ease that was deceptive and disarming. Her face was pale. The red warmth of her lips seemed enough to melt the snowy whiteness of her teeth.

"It's ten days since I saw you," said Banning

anxiously. "I've got to leave town to-morrow for a week, possibly two, and simply had to see you before I went."

"I'm glad you ran over. Where are you going?"

"Boston. Things seem to be picking up. I hope it lasts. Much as I hate to spend a week or two in New England."

"Your mother will miss you."

"I suppose she will. She has asked about you several times."

"I didn't imagine she had given me a second thought."

"Why not?" asked Banning, puzzled. "Why shouldn't she? She is very much interested in you."

"Oh, I hardly think so. It was a mistake for me to meet your mother. I ought to have known better," said Jessup abruptly.

Banning detected a sudden bitterness in her voice. He protested: "What's happened? What's the trouble? What do you mean, Diana? I've never seen you in this mood. You seem to have gathered a very distorted impression."

"Oh, no, I haven't," replied Jessup quickly. "She doesn't like anything about me."

"Nonsense," he scoffed.

"You know she doesn't."

"You've got her all wrong," spoke Banning patiently. "Mother is naturally undemonstrative. Our whole family is. But if she seemed cold to you, I'm sure she didn't mean it that way. She likes you and admires you. She has said so repeatedly."

"She doesn't have to say it," answered Jessup with spirit.

"Diana!"

"Don't call me Diana. It's not my name."

"I've named you Diana, and that makes it your name so far as I am concerned," declared Banning. He leaned sympathetically forward. "Won't you please tell me what is troubling you?"

Jessup's brooding eyes remained fixed on the hearth-rug. "If I wasn't good enough to meet your mother when I was in the chorus, I'm not good enough to meet her now," she said crisply. "I haven't changed."

"Don't be absurd," he protested gently. "She couldn't help but love you."

Jessup gave a short laugh. "It doesn't matter much one way or the other."

"On the contrary. It matters a great deal. I won't have you depressed and made unhappy by mistaken ideas. Believe me when I say that you are only imagining these things."

Jessup shook her head. A wave of bitterness provoked her to say: "Don't you suppose I know? She doesn't think I'm on the same plane with her."

"For God's sake, Diana!" exclaimed Banning. He crossed to her, and sat on the arm of her chair. "Look here, what kind of a gloomy depression has got hold of you, anyway? This won't do. You've got to come out of it. Why, your hands are as cold as ice. I'll build a fire."

"Don't bother. I don't want a fire," she said. Her lips curled a little, and she added: "It would be dif-

ferent I suppose, if I belonged to the Howard Jessups of Buffalo."

"That isn't a very fair thing to say," he objected.

"Is it a fair thing to throw up to me?" demanded Jessup, withdrawing her hands from his grasp. "Is it fair to keep harping on it? How do you suppose it makes me feel? I am quizzed and questioned as if I were an upstart. I am made to feel that my people were outcasts. Well, I want you to know that they weren't. My father was one of the most successful men in St. Louis. And so was his father before him. I tell you I won't be patronized. I won't be looked at askance. I won't be made to feel cheap. I won't have it. I won't stand it!"

Banning looked at her in astonished silence. "Look here, Diana. You're sensitive. You're supersensitive. But I love you for it. Listen to me. I love you for it. I love you for everything you are and for everything you do. I adore that spirit of yours."

"Don't!" interrupted Jessup. "Don't talk to me any more. I wish you'd go!"

"Leave you while you're in this frame of mind? No, I couldn't think of it. I should never be able to forgive myself. I'm going to stay right here. You're coming to dinner with me. But before we go, you've got to understand something that I should have made clear to you long ago. You've got to understand that I love you. I should have told you before, but I thought you knew. There was a kind of charm about knowing it but not talking about it."

Jessup listened passively to Banning's rapid sen-

tences. A look of patient skepticism smoldered in her eyes. A faint, hurt, questioning smile appeared on her lips.

"There's not a thing I wouldn't do to make you happy," continued the rush of Banning's words. "I don't know whether you care for me or not, but if you don't, I'm going to make you care. You've got to let me love you. I've been drawn to you by a force that I haven't been able to resist. It's unlike anything that has ever happened to me. We're peculiarly alike; that's what it is. I can understand your sensitiveness. I've had the same thing myself to contend with all my life. I understand everything about you. I tell you we were meant for each other. We were born for each other. We're so much alike that nothing on earth can keep us apart. Why, we even look alike!"

Banning stopped abruptly. He was looking into a face from which the color was gone. He saw a look of horror in Jessup's eyes.

"Diana!" demanded Banning, alarmed. "Why do you look at me like that?"

But Jessup did not answer. Her eyes remained fixed, as if their stare had its source in a cavern of infinite gloom and suspicion. In these depths, Jessup felt close to maddening ancestral secrets which remained shut off from her by impenetrable fogs.

"Diana, what is it? Why do you look at me like that?" she could hear him ask.

Jessup continued to stare. The look of strangeness in her eyes deepened into the futile and inarticulate melancholy of a lifetime.

"I want to be alone," she finally said with an effort.

"Did you hear me, Diana?" he insisted. "I love you! I love you!"

"Yes, I hear you. But don't tell me any more just now," she pleaded.

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHTFALL was closing in on a grey, slushy, February day. The doors of office-buildings, like enormous mouths, were exhaling their evening crowds of devitalized people who were making a tired rush for New York's multitude of conveyances. Sixth Avenue was bending to its nightly task like a Brobdingnagian human hod-carrier. The crash of its elevateds, the grind of motor traffic, and the unearthly rumble of subways mingled together in a harsh anthem of home-going. The yellow glow of the shop-windows was muffled in a wintry mist that hunched up the shoulders of the pedestrians and drew their chins down into overcoat collars and neckpieces.

Among the pedestrians who were hurrying along Fourteenth Street, there was one who lacked the practiced gait of those who rush every evening over the same streets and sidewalks toward the same subway or elevated station. Her long black cape inclosed slender shoulders, and her narrow shoes were snugly incased in overshoes. There was a wistfulness about the poise of her shoulders, and a lightness and swing in her stride.

It was the first time that Jessup had explored this portion of the city. It was remote, not in miles, but in character and spirit, from the Sixth Avenue of the

Rialto which she knew so well. The home-going crowds interested her, but the lighted windows, greyed by the breath of the February mist, interested her more. Of late she had trudged for hours each day through strange streets, searching innumerable windows with hungry and reflective eyes. To-night she was tired and hesitant, filled with a mysterious melancholy and an infinite solitude. But in the midst of this solitude a taper glowed. Its beams lit her anxious face with a look of resolution, and kept a faint smile playing occasionally about her lips.

She was on an extraordinary mission. She was in search of an ancestor.

Jessup was grateful for the fog. It met and mingled with the fog that pervaded her own inner world. It seemed to her that brightness and sunshine would have made her scream. She recalled having read somewhere that more suicides occurred on sunny days than on cloudy days; and she could readily understand the morbid compulsion that made a world flooded with sun an intolerable irony. This evening's wet and penetrating mists were a satisfying objective symbol of the inner mists that dampened and darkened her spirits. She inhaled the thick air deeply, and derived a sensuous pleasure from its chilling contact with her lungs.

The dusk of this mist-muffled day seemed to her to be a fitting hour in which to be tramping the streets in search of an ancestor. Too vigorously imaginative to endure the blankness of the paternal wall that inscrutably shut off the view behind her, she had spent countless hours in piecing together a conception of

what her father and his people must have been. Little by little, the images had grown from vagueness into more tangible outlines and depths and colorings. The picturing of these elements to herself had gradually drawn her into the quest that was now dragging her to the repositories of old pictures.

She had rummaged through many ancient files of photographs. On one pretext or another, she had examined hundreds of cabinet photographs and daguerreotypes, inspecting them eagerly, searching disappointing and illusory features for something of the traits and lineaments that had established themselves in her mind.

Crossing the street, she soon discovered the establishment she was looking for. Its dusty atmosphere brooded over a litter of prints and photographs. The walls were hung with framed water-colors and enlargements of photographs. In the rear of the place, beneath the gray canopy of a backyard skylight, was the camera room. The proprietor peered genially at Jessup through thick lenses. With stiffened fingers he placed a book-mark in the German novel he was reading, rose politely, and said:

"Good evening, Miss. What can I show you?"

"Perhaps I'm too late," replied Jessup. "It's nearly six. It must be near your closing time. Perhaps I'd better run in another time."

"I'm open until eight, Miss," he answered in a Bavarian accent. "What can I show you? Some nice imported prints? Some examples of my photographs?" He looked intently at her. "I'd like to make some

pictures of you," he said with interest. "I'm sure I could please you."

"Nothing of myself. I'm just looking for old photographs."

"Old photographs? That is not difficult here. Thousands of people have sat for me." He reached stiffly for an enormous drawer and pulled it open.

"You see I am well supplied. Mark Twain was one of my customers. I have made I don't know how many pictures of Carl Schurz. There is one of the best of them." He indicated a picture on the wall. "President Cleveland once posed for me." The last was spoken with a sigh; Presidents no longer came to him to be photographed.

Jessup was running rapidly through handfuls of photographs.

"Can you see? Let me give you a little more light," said the Bavarian.

"This is ample, thank you."

Her search, as usual, was engrossing but depressing. The blank, unarresting faces that passed in review before her filled her with an overwhelming sense of the futility of these lives. The procession was one of pinched and embittered faces; of bulky faces totally void of any glow of the spirit; of anemic wall-eyed children; of awkward brides and grooms embarking blindly on the hazards of their mating; of storekeepers in deadly Sabbath clothes; of browbeaten wives seated in the center of hopeless family groups.

"My, but you've taken a lot of pictures in your

time," observed Jessup, marveling at the endless mass of prints.

"Yes, I've got a good many pictures in my morgue," said the Bavarian with pride.

"In your morgue?" repeated Jessup. "It seems to me that this is about the only claim to immortality that most of these people have."

"That's true too," chuckled the photographer. "They come and go."

Jessup was looking intently at a photograph of a youthful-looking woman. There was a melancholy beauty about it, a delicate and sheltered structure about the face. There was poise and graciousness, a gentleness in this face that made it seem out of place among these meaningless pictures.

"What an interesting picture!" exclaimed Jessup. "Who sat for this? Do you remember?"

He examined it carefully, then shook his head. "So many people have sat for me. They come and go. She's fine-looking, ain't she?"

"Very distinguished-looking. Would you remember, do you suppose, if she had been prominent?"

"Sure I would. Wait! I do remember something about her. She came in here one day, sat for a picture, paid her deposit, and never came back again. That happens oftener than you would think. No, she never came back again."

"How long ago was that?" asked Jessup with interest.

"Oh, I don't know. Twenty-five years ago anyway. That's an old picture."

"Will you sell it to me?"

"*Gewiss!* Why not?"

"How much do you ask for it?"

"Oh, twenty-five cents."

Jessup bought it.

She carried it away with an exultance. It satisfied a craving that had been consuming her. It provided her with a gracious and consoling image to commune with.

The next day she ordered a frame for it, and featured it prominently in her apartment.

Another time Jessup made a still more important discovery. This occurred in a Madison Avenue art shop. She found a portrait, done in oil, of a venerable-looking gentleman of the period of about 1850. The dealer had dug it laboriously out of a pile of doubtful canvases and had rubbed off an accumulation of dust.

"Perhaps you were looking for something on this order?" he asked, standing back and surveying it.

"Yes, I like it," answered Jessup, studying the portrait attentively.

"I didn't know I had it," said the dealer, continuing to clean the canvas. "Goodness knows what else I've got stowed away back in there. There's some fine draughtsmanship here. A nice feeling for color. Let me see if it's signed. No, there doesn't seem to be any signature. Well, that's too bad."

While the dealer chattered on, Jessup stood gazing into the genial eyes of the painted figure. She found a kindliness there. The wide, mature mouth seemed on the point of smiling. There was an informality about

the ruffled hair, and the neckwear was reminiscent of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster.

"An interesting old fellow, isn't he?" remarked the dealer.

"Yes, very. What will you take for it?" asked Jessup with sudden decision.

The dealer rubbed his chin speculatively. "Well, suppose we say fifty dollars."

Enticed by a sudden bargaining impulse, Jessup offered him thirty.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll split the difference," said the dealer, who would have been glad to turn the canvas into ready money at almost any figure.

"All right. When can you deliver it?"

"To-day."

Jessup's motive in purchasing these pictures had been primarily to gratify her own craving for ancestral symbols with which to fill the void of uncertainty that oppressed and distracted her. She had never seen a picture of her mother, since apparently the Helms, moved by parochial wrath, had destroyed every likeness of their wayward daughter that they possessed. Her curiosity had largely become pointed in the direction of her father's family so that she now whimsically designated the newly-acquired portrait as Amos Jessup, her great-grandfather. The photograph, she decided, would be a picture of her mother.

Free from any intent, at this time, to use them to deceive Ivan Banning, Jessup's act had originated solely in the desire to fill an emptiness that tormented her.

Having settled upon the notion that she wished that she had sprung from such forebears as these, she presently began thinking of them *as* her forebears.

This fantastic idea she found entertaining. It was irrational but amusing, absurd but indubitably comforting. It gave her, for the first time in her life, a sense of tradition. Her daring, free-handed invention gradually was giving way to a romantic sense of reality, which she did not resist. It was not uncommon, she reflected, to adopt a child and to regard it as one's own; therefore why not adopt ancestors?

In the serenity of mind that followed, Jessup viewed more calmly her recent scene with Ivan Banning. She was no longer troubled by her shocking surmises, which now seemed morbid and absurd. His fervent remark that they looked alike no longer pressed in upon her with its former sinister significance.

Banning had not seen her for a fortnight. Desolated over the distress he had unmeaningly caused her, he had written daily while he was in Boston. His letters were full of tenderness. Receiving no reply, he had finally called her on long distance and had been vastly relieved to hear her say that she was feeling better and hoped to see him on his return.

Arriving in New York, he went directly to the theater, saw part of the last act, and met Jessup at the close of the performance.

"I finished at four this afternoon," he explained, "wired you at once that I was coming, caught the five o'clock train, and here I am. I never saw you looking better. These are the longest two weeks I've ever lived.

Could hardly wait to get back to you. Now that I'm here, I feel like singing and dancing. I don't know where we can sing, but I know where we can dance. What do you say? You're not too tired?" he inquired anxiously.

"Not for a dance or two," said Jessup with enthusiasm.

An hour later, they stood at the door of Jessup's house. Their faces were flushed with dancing. Flakes of snow had lodged on Jessup's furs, and a few sparkled on her face. Banning was looking at her with sensual eyes. He was filled with a sudden reckless desire.

"Good night," she said.

"You're beautiful!" he exclaimed, taking both her hands.

"Yes?" she laughed.

"I can't let you go. Don't send me away."

"It's late. I'm afraid I'll have to say good night," said Jessup, doubting her own strength to resist.

"Let me go up with you just for a moment," begged Banning.

"Not to-night," she protested.

"I've got to talk to you. Let me go up with you for just a few minutes. Please. I won't stay long. Say you will let me."

"It's so very late," said Jessup in a low voice.

"Please! I've got to talk to you, Diana," insisted Banning.

Jessup smiled. "What do you have to talk about

at this hour of the night, I should like to know?" she asked.

"About us."

"It will keep."

"What are you doing?" he demanded abruptly. "Just playing with me?"

"Is it necessary to be so tragic?" asked Jessup, regarding him steadfastly.

"I care for you too much to be taken lightly." He drew closer. "I can't sleep. I can't work, for thinking about you. I walk the floor at night. It's all I can do to keep from grabbing the telephone and calling you up in the middle of the night, just to hear your voice. If I'm tragic about it, I can't help it. I've walked up and down like a kid in front of this house at three and four o'clock in the morning just to be near you. I've been half crazed with jealousy."

"With jealousy?" she echoed.

"Yes, with jealousy."

"Of whom?"

"How do I know? Of the men who see you in the theater. Of your managers. God only knows how many men are crazy about you."

Jessup smiled quizzically.

"I knew it," said Banning bitterly. "It drives me almost mad to have you on the stage, Diana, with every Tom, Dick and Harry, able to stare at you by the hour. It makes public property of you almost. I can't think of it. It makes me want to drag you away somewhere out of everybody else's sight."

"Why, you savage!" retorted Jessup, caught by his mood.

"There have been times when I was fool enough to think that you cared for me," continued Banning miserably. "Then again I've been convinced that I am only one of many. It's only natural that men should fall in love with you. I don't see how they can help it. If you're irresistible to me, you must be irresistible to others."

"There've been no indications that I'm so irresistible to you," she challenged.

Banning's hands closed tightly over her arms at the elbows. He continued with intensity: "No one else can care for you as much as I do. I'm going to prove it to you. I'll teach you what it really means to be loved."

The passionate tension of Banning's outburst roused her. Her blood quickened, as if the fire of his being was actually flowing into hers from the hands that were grasping her arms. An electric warmth spread through her. An exquisite weakness suffused her, leaving her silent.

"You're shivering. You're cold. We mustn't stand here," Banning was saying.

Jessup's eyelids drooped heavily. Her lips were slightly parted. She was engulfed in a gorgeous dream that surrounded her like huge tropical blossoms and enveloped her in enormous petals and languorous perfumes.

Completely lost to her objective surroundings, she heard nothing of what Banning was saying. Then she

felt herself slowly returning. His pleading again became audible.

"Come, you're cold," she could hear him urge. "You can't stand here. Let me take you up."

An impulse to obey swayed her. She started for the apartment, then stopped abruptly.

"Please, not to-night," she begged almost inaudibly.

The moment of yielding had almost overwhelmed her but was now passing. There was a tinge of wistful triumph in her smile. She said: "Run along now."

"First say that you care for me," Banning insisted.

In answer she surrendered herself indulgently to his intense kisses, but displayed neither resistance nor response.

CHAPTER IX

A CONFLICT of emotions attended Jessup to her apartment after Banning had gone. Before switching on her lights, she crossed to the window, as though half-expecting him still to be lingering about. The memory of imperious perfumes and sensuous blossoms pressed insistently into her consciousness, and filled her with arresting reveries, and a sense of emotional loneliness. She reflected that she had been a fool to send Banning away; that he was a bigger fool for going. She kept repeating that she had a right to him. As if to recall him, she started again for the window and peered out into the deserted street, gray with a thin layer of snow. She questioned the rush of inhibitions that had made her ward him off.

She was preparing absently for bed. Switching off the lights, she raised the shades, and again directed a glance at the wintry street, but Banning was nowhere in sight. Throwing back the taffeta spread, she slipped into bed. Lying relaxed, she realized that the inflexible will with which she had always remonstrated with men and resisted their advances, seemed to be lapsing into languid inaction. She stretched and yawned restlessly. After all, she mused, what had this guardedness and restraint profited her? A few years more, and she would be old. She was jealously appraising her youth,

which she had hitherto regarded as a matter of course. Suddenly her youth seemed very precious and very fleeting. It seemed to be flowing away like an unused, neglected river. Mysterious protests swept out of the unconscious into the front of her mind. Urgent voices whispered to her. There was a seductive eloquence in their whispering.

The intuitive reactions that had invariably quelled her sexual impulses, now seemed to represent hostile, menacing forces bent upon robbing her. She perceived that she was allowing herself to be cheated out of something that was due her. What had her persistent guardedness accomplished, save only this burden of intolerable solitude? To-night this solitude seemed unnatural and obnoxious, worse than the evils it had sought to replace. Reckless impulses sprang to life and diffused a radiance through her brain and body.

Jessup's determination never to marry was deeply rooted in the somber soil of her own origin, and had been steadfastly nurtured by the conviction that no act of hers must ever be responsible for inflicting her own ancestral woes upon still another human being. The horror of ever being held accountable for a child had made her shrink involuntarily from permitting herself to yield to special interest in any one man. Banning's friendship and its sentimental claims upon her were gradually cutting her loose from her resolution never to marry. She felt nervously adrift.

Confused longings were swinging through her in a glowing skein: little by little she yielded to fantasies that were new to her imagination and subtly drugging

to her will: nuances of desire were creeping through her with irresistible rhythm. From invisible vials rose a sensuous fragrance, filling the darkness like tinted smoke, and pervading her limp body. The air of the room seemed filled with enormous unseen violets, and poppies, and orchids, which distilled troubling dreams that invaded her cool tissues and made her burn like a crater.

Imperious longings tormented her.

When Jessup awoke, one by one the events, impressions, and reveries of the previous night rehearsed themselves. Now, by day, with a cool and unemotional mind, she proceeded to weigh her deliberate emotional longing, and found that she sanctioned it. She did not question her right to Ivan Banning.

While she lay in bed, engaged in these meditations, there was a rap at the door, and a negro maid entered with Jessup's breakfast tray. It was Jessup's custom to breakfast in bed, and she had been able to engage part of the time of her landlady's maid for this service.

"Mah goodness, Miss Jessup, you-all sho' do look bright and peart this mo'nin'," said the negress genially, as she arranged the breakfast dishes on Jessup's bed-tray.

"Thank you, Jane. That coffee smells good."

"Yes, ma'am. You certainly looks rested and refreshed. Say, Miss Jessup, why you don't employ me for all mah time? I'm tellin' you I'd jest love to be workin' for you all de time, helpin' you dress, an' gettin' your dinners an' all."

"That's a luxury I couldn't afford," laughed Jessup, snuggling cozily among the pillows. "Besides, you'd have me spoiled in less than no time."

"An' why shouldn't you be spoiled, Miss Jessup? I'm sure I don't know who'd have a better right. I declar', I can't see for the life o' me why some man ain't come along an' stole you long ago."

"You're just an old flatterer," replied Jessup lightly.

"Not much, I ain't," protested the black admiringly. "I never did see such skin and such color in all my life. An' as fo' disposition, well, they don't make 'em no better, that's all. Only there is times when you seem so all-fired lonely-like. An' when you feels that way, that's the time some man is goin' to steal you right out from under mah nose, Miss Jessup."

"Would you miss me?" asked Jessup good-naturedly.

"Miss you? Why you don't ask me somp'n hahd? Why, I'd up and trail right along after you. You couldn't shake me no matter how hahd you tried. Why, chil', I've taken a God-awful love an' likin' for you."

In the midst of Jessup's breakfast, the telephone rang. With a feeling of excited suspense, she answered. It was Ivan. His voice was solicitous.

"What kind of a mood am I responsible for this morning?" he inquired.

"It's too early in the day for moods. I'm still half asleep," replied Jessup.

"Half asleep?" he repeated. "I was in hopes that I had waked you up."

"You did," Jessup replied.



"Last night or this morning?" he questioned.

"Perhaps both times," laughed Jessup nervously.

"Tell me about it at dinner to-night."

"But wait. Just a minute. Let me see," added Jessup. "Would you just as soon make it for supper after the theater instead?"

"Any time you say," replied Banning.

"I think supper would be better," said Jessup with a calmness she did not feel.

"I'll call for you as usual," returned Banning. "Shall we go to some lively place like the Plantation?"

"We can come here," said Jessup quietly.

"To your apartment?" Banning's reply was not free from surprise.

"Yes. Would you like to?"

"Of course."

"All right, then. I'll see you to-night."

Jessup replaced the receiver exultantly. She realized that she had committed herself to a course of action that a few days ago had not occurred to her. She knew that Banning could not have failed to grasp the entire meaning of her suggestion. The coral-colored tint of her face deepened. She had committed herself and did not regret it.

It was near midnight when Jessup unlocked the door and admitted Ivan and herself into the house.

An awkward silence had risen between them several times on the way from the theater. On Jessup's part, the silence reflected more of a rational resignation than an emotional eagerness to follow out the deliberate

plans she had laid. There were moments when she seemed to be viewing the whole proceeding objectively from a comfortable distance; and yet there were moments when she had to exert her will to repress an hysterical impulse to escape.

On Ivan Banning's part, these recurrent silences reflected the inner tension of holding himself in strict reserve under conditions that glowed profoundly with temptation. For he had quickly arrived at a convincing interpretation of Jessup's suggestion that they go to her apartment at this hour; he saw in it only an intention to test his inherent decency and his loyalty to her.

"Hungry?" she asked, busily occupying herself with her wraps.

"A little," was his rather strained reply.

"You seem indifferent," said Jessup.

"About food, yes," he answered. "You see I am trying hard to suppress my various animal inclinations."

"You aren't always quite so tamed. I never did forget that wild outburst of yours about architects," said Jessup.

"The anonymity of architects no longer makes me savage," rejoined Banning. "I have since learned that there are things in life that are much more important than floor-space and building materials."

Aware of the hint of emotion in his voice, Jessup inquired calmly:

"Tell me, what are you building these days?"

"Mainly air castles."

"Indeed. That's interesting. What are they like? Solid Tudor affairs with massive old hearthstones and

beamed ceilings? With elusive entrances and exits, mysterious trellises, and dusky lighting?"

Without waiting for a reply, Jessup began rapid preparations for supper.

Banning stood watching her moodily. Doubts as to what her relations might be with other men began troubling him. This ushered in a distracting suspicion. If she had not been accustomed to have men in her apartment at this late hour, would she have gone to the extent of inviting him to-night even for the purpose of testing him? It hardly seemed possible. Was it a commonplace occurrence for men to be here at this hour? The thought gritted through his brain. It left him depressed and saturnine.

"Hello," he said, discovering the portrait on Jessup's wall. He crossed to it with interest. "Something new?" he inquired.

"No, something old," answered Jessup briefly, without pausing in her work.

"A relative, of course," he said with interest.

"My great-grandfather," replied Jessup, stirring rapidly. "Don't you think we look alike?"

"Very much," returned Banning, studying the portrait closely. "Yes, there's quite a marked resemblance. You have his forehead and temples. When did you hang it? Surely you didn't have it the last time I was here?"

"No, it arrived the other day."

"By Jove, now I'm actually beginning to know you." Banning continued to study the portrait.

"Oh, indeed," said Jessup dryly. "Have I seemed so mysterious to you?"

"I must admit there has been an air of elusiveness about you at times."

"Yes?" questioned Jessup.

"I hardly know how to explain it," answered Banning reflectively. "But, you know, sometimes you vaguely suggest a dozen different backgrounds, without being identified with any of them. You don't seem to belong to the stage. This apartment doesn't seem like you. Perhaps it's the home element that's lacking. I have naturally tried to think of you in terms of your people. That's what makes this portrait so interesting. It adds perspective. It helps round out the picture. Who is this on the table? Your mother?" Banning studied the photograph.

"How did you guess?" asked Jessup.

"This is curiously as I pictured your mother to be."

"Then you aren't disappointed?"

"Just the opposite. Come here. Let me see how closely you resemble each other."

"Not now. I'm busy. Do I have to be the duplicate of an interesting picture in order to be interesting myself?"

There was a note of challenge in Jessup's question. "When I can drag you away from the subject of ancestors," she added crisply, "I wish you'd pull this cork. I've just discovered a bottle of sauterne."

"I never refused an invitation like that," replied Banning. "Here's a toast to the ancestor," he said later, turning to the portrait.

"To the ancestor," repeated Jessup, looking into the comprehending eyes that peered down at her from the wall, eyes that could take a joke and keep a secret.

Jessup had no appetite. Now and again her glance would sweep to the photograph on the table, chastely framed in silver, which she had herself almost grown to accept as the likeness of her mother. She had never seen a picture of her mother, although she had surreptitiously rummaged about in the Helmans' attic and cellar and through bureau drawers in a vain search.

Her thoughts kept revolving about the vague and baffling notion of what her mother had actually been like. The features remained lost in a cloud of uncertainty, but in the developing-bath of Jessup's imagination, the enigmatic negative began little by little to disclose some idea of her mother's temperament. It was a hungry, inarticulate temperament. A dumb straining to express itself. A bewildering fire that flamed into recklessness and defiance. A passionate eloquence of the flesh.

For the first time in her life, Jessup sensed the wayward course that had heretofore always mystified and horrified her. Perhaps in that bitter exercise of the flesh, that dumb and pitiful spirit had found an outlet for something that was being stifled by the narrowness of the family and the village.

In this flash of intuition, it was with difficulty that Jessup forced herself to conceal the depth of her emotions from Banning.

"What are you thinking about so seriously?" he

inquired, breaking the silence. "You seemed a thousand miles away."

"I was."

"Then I wasn't in your thoughts. But I want to be, Diana. I can't be separated from you much longer. I've got to have you with me all the time."

Banning rose and sat on the arm of her chair. "I didn't mean to talk to you like this to-night," he continued earnestly. "I didn't mean to take advantage of your letting me come. But I'm helpless when I'm near you. You do care for me, don't you?"

As Jessup listened, she was divided between the impulse to believe and to doubt.

"I can hardly believe you mean all that," she said at length, looking at him with quizzical curiosity.

"How can you say that?" he demanded. "Of course I mean it."

"Perhaps it's the hour that makes you a bit sentimental," interrupted Jessup.

He darted an answering look at her. "You're right. I'm talking too much. What the devil are a lot of words? This is no time to talk to you."

Banning seized her hungrily. The eagerness of his kisses made it useless for her to resist, and in her dizzied yielding she closed her eyes as if to shut out the watchful impulses of evasion and self-protection. Through her dimmed consciousness ran jets of fire that touched her nerves with a peculiar incandescence. A fever glowed in her veins and filled her body with a singular incense. Back of her silent lips hovered new words and phrases, the groping grammar and syntax

of an emotion that before this had been only fugitive and inarticulate. But she did not utter any of the words that were stringing themselves with nervous energy across the cloudy horizon of her mind. The limpness of her body gave no hint of the cruelties she could gladly have endured.

Banning released her abruptly, lit a cigarette, and strode to the window.

"I don't know what you think of me," he said at length. "I've done exactly the sort of thing that I promised myself solemnly not to do. I deserve to be ordered out."

She regarded him curiously. "That's amusing," she answered soberly.

Banning's glance betrayed astonishment. "In what way amusing?" he asked uncomfortably.

"The way you apologize," she said ironically.

"I've been awkward. I know. I'm sorry. I've offended you. It was beastly of me. It wasn't me. I lost my head," stated Banning in confusion.

Jessup's answering smile was vaguely hurt, but Banning missed its meaning.

"What do you think I am? A child?" she demanded suddenly, "that you overwhelm me with affection one minute and punish me the next?"

"My apology wasn't meant as punishment. But you mean too much to me. I can't treat you just as an object to vent my passion."

"Why not? After all, isn't that what all women are?" asked Jessup with a flash of reminiscent bitterness.

"No. You must understand that you have become very sacred to me. Naturally I wouldn't be human if I weren't hungry for you. You're like a marvelous, brimming goblet set before a man parched with thirst. It's all I can do to keep my hands off of you. Just being in the same room with you sets me on fire."

Banning's earnestness left Jessup without an answer.

"But can't you see I'm afraid," he continued. "I'd never forgive myself. Maybe I'm old-fashioned. I don't know. But I care too much for you. It isn't myself that I'm thinking of. It's you. Don't you see that I want to protect you?"

"Protect me?" she questioned. "What's your idea of protection? To find out if I respond, and then blandly dismiss me as too sacred? Don't you suppose I feel like a fool?"

"Why should you? Can't I make it clear to you," he said, taking her by the shoulders and looking severely into her eyes, "that I'm afraid—afraid of myself at this time? Now I'm going to run along. At another time we'll talk about it."

"But now is the time," insisted Jessup. "You asked me if I cared. Haven't I shown you that I do? Haven't I shown you that I'm lonely for you now?"

"Do you trust me to that extent, or is this just a test?" he asked, drawing her to him. "Look here," he added brusquely. "It's time we understood each other. Why isn't marriage the natural, the logical, the inevitable thing for us to talk about? It is, isn't it?"

"Why?" Jessup asked. "Because you lost your

head, as you call it, and think you have to make amends with talk about getting married? Is that why?"

"No, that isn't why," declared Banning earnestly.

"You mean that you care for me that way? As much as that?"

"Of course I do. I thought you knew it."

"How was I to know it?" asked Jessup.

"I thought I showed it in a hundred different ways. Surely you must have seen that I wasn't taking our relations lightly."

"I didn't know."

"From now on, please don't doubt me any more," said Banning soberly.

Jessup did not answer. She was wishing that Ivan had said these things without having been drawn on deliberately by herself. By degrees a feeling of guilt came over her; she felt that she had had no right to involve him in the declarations he had just made; she had concealed too much from him.

Her sense of elation, of triumph, was checked by the feeling that she had tricked him.

"Don't doubt me any more, Diana."

"Don't talk about it now. Another time," said Jessup with an effort.

"All right. You're tired. Another time," he answered.

The genuineness of Ivan's devotion left her helpless before her own accusing thoughts.

CHAPTER X

JESSUP's discovery of the real quality of Banning's devotion left her pondering. It was difficult to adjust herself to this new conception of him. She was disturbed and bewildered. Never having permitted the idea of marriage to figure prominently in either her plans or her fancies, his definite assertion that he was not only ready but impatient to make her his wife, created a problem that was new to her and distressing.

She cared deeply for him. He was a type of man, and symbolized the kind of tradition, of which she had stood in awe. She was aware that if she had cared for him less, she might not now be hesitating about her answer. But the sense of guilt that had overwhelmed her when he spoke of marriage had steadily deepened since his departure. Her various inferences and the mass of false pretenses with which she had carefully surrounded herself, rose accusingly. She realized that if she married him, those lies would loom between them with dark and persistent menace. She knew that he thought of her in terms of the family background she had invented, and that his affection could not conceivably survive his knowledge of the actual facts.

Until she could decide, she shrank from seeing him again, and sternly ignored the insistent ringing of the telephone the next morning. But the knowledge that

it was Ivan filled her with a quiet elation, as if victory had touched her spirit. The sense of inferiority that had plagued her, was receding. She felt less like an outcast. Gentler humors began visiting her; New York spoke to her in more pleasing accents; and the whole beat of life seemed to be changing into a more bearable cadence.

She began really enjoying her work at the theater; her companions irritated her less; and the audiences no longer seemed to be hostile forces that had to be conquered. In her drawing, the tension with which she had been working gave way to more of an ease and relaxation. She felt less inarticulate and her confused mental images were developing into clearer outlines.

"That's an odd thing you've got there," said one of the instructors, looking at a half-finished sketch. "What is it? A poster idea?"

The figure on her drawing-board was that of a dark woman wrapped in a long varicolored cape. In her hand was a peacock fan and on one of her fingers a large ruby.

"That's a good figure," added the instructor. "You've got a good imaginative quality in the costume. Ever try any costume-designing? Knowing the stage as you do, you might be able to do costumes."

Jessup's ideas kept reverting to fabrics and garb, to the human figure as a frame for expressive draperies and colors. Selecting different temperaments, she would interpret them with her brushes in appropriate garments, and wrap them in mysterious folds. She

experimented with a score of varied types. From the imaginary dress of individual figures, she began extending her efforts to groups of figures, which led her in turn to dramatic grouping, and to interesting attempts to reveal character and motive in the subtle sweep and lines of the garments.

She grew critical of the costuming of the production in which she was appearing. There was something misleading about the gowns she wore. Inexpressive of her artistic intent, it became annoying and irritating. She attempted to design different conceptions of her own, but all of them proved inaccurate, and most of them overdrawn or grotesque. She was aiming at a certain tang, a strangeness, a comic spirit of mischief. But her results, instead of expressing what she was striving for, seemed to her only a confusion of inept and bizarre misrepresentation.

The study of clothes as symbols of character and of moods began to engross her. She studied fabrics at dozens of different shops. With a glow of curiosity she hunted new colors, and the discovery of certain rare and satisfying shades repaid her amply for the time it had taken to find them. She studied the stream of women on the Avenue, judging the fitness of their clothes, and discovering many whom she would eagerly have used as subjects to recostume in keeping with their individuality.

She would gaze at women whose personalities contained an element of originality, or beauty, or mystery. When she perceived necks, arms and fingers loaded with jewelry, she felt like stripping them of their

jewels and substituting a single unusual ornament. She became sensitive to the hues of furs, the tints of complexions. Occasionally she would discover women who were neither beautiful nor young, yet so perfectly attired that they exerted a potent magnetism.

Soon after Banning's visit, the sight of the portrait suddenly filled Jessup with a rush of forebodings that made her seize the painting and thrust its face to the wall. Turning to the photograph on the table, she also found that disturbing. The sense of humor with which she had searched for these pictures no longer afforded her any comfort.

But the morning brought happy changes in her mood. She awoke with the sun brightly flooding her bedroom and illuminating it with the warmth of a mercurial vitality.

"Parties, balls an' festivals!" exclaimed the maid, arriving with the breakfast tray.

"What's the matter, Jane?" demanded Jessup.

"Say, Miss Jessup, you must have had some wind blowin' through heah last night. It's a wonder it didn't blow you clean out of yo' bed an' all over de place. Why, it blowed this great big picture clean around and banged its face right smack against de wall!"

"Really," answered Jessup. "Fix it, will you please?"

"I will in a minute, Miss Jessup. I done brought you some waffles dis mo'nin'."

"Bring them in. I'm ravenous."

"Ravenous is 'de way to be," smiled the darky. "Yoah appetite ain't been nothin' like it ought to been heah lately. Why, you ain't hardly been eatin' enough to keep body and soul together. I've been so anxious an' worried about you, Miss Jessup, that once or twice I've been tempted to callin' in a doctah."

"Nonsense, I'm not sick. I don't need any medicine," scoffed Jessup.

"Dat's jest the conclusion I come to myself. What you need is jest the same an' no more nor less than any woman needs. Yo' needs a man to take care o' you."

"Good heavens," Jessup answered, "after all the good-for-nothing men you've been married to, I shouldn't think you'd have the nerve to recommend a man even to your worst enemy."

Ivan Banning had reached an emotional impasse that only marriage could dissolve. He wondered what his mother would say, and concluded that she would raise strenuous objections. She had met Jessup only once, but that had been sufficient to disclose an intangible hostility. Ivan had for a time continued to hope that Jessup's grievance had been more fancied than actual, but had been compelled to accept her conclusions as authentic, and now he wondered whether strategy, or concealment, or an open issue between his mother and himself might best serve his purpose.

Knowing her willfulness, he dismissed as impracticable the notion of endeavoring to win her round to his views. The two remaining alternatives were either to tell her of his intentions and go ahead in open op-

position to her, or to proceed secretly and to let her find it out afterwards. While he was considering these alternatives, his mother brought matters abruptly to an issue.

They were spending an evening together at home. Banning was absent-mindedly turning the pages of an architectural journal, and his mother was rapidly scanning the last chapter of a Galsworthy novel.

"Galsworthy is so finished and modern," she said complacently, as she closed the book. "He is such a relief after some of these impossible American novelists who have just made the discovery that there is such a thing as sex in the world and keep harping on it incessantly."

"Is that so?" replied Ivan. "I rarely get time to look at a book any more."

"Yes, you do seem to be extraordinarily occupied of late. Your interest seems to have turned to the theater, I believe."

"Oh, I haven't seen so many plays," yawned Banning.

"No, you seem entirely absorbed with one. Do you see much of that Miss Jessup?"

"Now and then. Why do you ask?" he inquired, startled by her directness.

"Because I hoped your infatuation would wear off. Don't bother to deny it, Ivan. You haven't been natural for several months. I want you to be sensible, and get hold of yourself, and try to shake this infatuation off."

"You talk as if it were an evil influence."

"I'm not so sure that it isn't."

"Why? Because Diana works for a living?" demanded the son belligerently. "Don't be antiquated!"

"But you don't know anything about her."

"I know all that I need to know," said Ivan impatiently.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Marry her, if she'll have me."

"I don't imagine she would offer any very serious objection."

"You don't know her," said Banning. "I don't know whether she'll have me or not. She says she won't."

"Really? She seems to have more intelligence than I gave her credit for," said Mrs. Banning, somewhat relieved.

"You don't know her. You saw her only once. You treated her with patronizing superiority, with a contempt so thinly veiled that a blind man could have seen it."

"Did she notice it?"

"How could she help it?"

"I was afraid it might have escaped her," replied his mother dryly.

"So you set out deliberately to insult her, did you?" he demanded, struggling to control his temper.

"If I insulted her, it was only to save you both from a very serious mistake."

Banning had often been brought face to face with a polite but inflexible decision on the part of his mother, but never prior to this with so sharp a bayonet-point of opposition. Suddenly it seemed to him that all the

pride and snobbery and bigotry of his parent had narrowed down into a blade that menaced Jessup. His eyes blazed.

"The discussion is useless," he was saying. "I've made up my mind. I'm sorry to have to go against your wishes, but after all, the problem is so personal that it lies entirely between Diana and myself."

"Not if you insist on marrying her," was the quick reply. "In that case it becomes a family matter." Mrs. Banning paused, and during the pause a more persuasive expression entered her eyes. "But you would make a very great mistake to marry her," she added.

"I don't agree with you at all," interrupted Banning with resentment. "You don't know her. You'll find out what an injustice you're doing her when you get better acquainted."

"I don't want to get better acquainted. I can understand, of course, why you would be more or less infatuated with her," she said in a kindlier voice. "She's a pretty little thing. She has elements of charm, and in her way she's not inartistic. But she can't possibly hold you any length of time, Ivan. Your feeling is bound to burn itself out. Fortunately, you don't *have* to marry her."

The somber emphasis of his mother's last sentence made Banning look at her sharply. "What?" he demanded bitingly.

"Do I have to be explicit?" she asked crisply.

"I don't follow you at all," he said sullenly.

"It's not a pretty subject for a mother to have to

discuss with a son. But I could never forgive myself if I permitted any sentimental nonsense to blind me at such a time as this. We're living in a practical world and in a practical age. I am merely suggesting the lesser of two evils. You have lost your head over a woman who is far beneath you socially. If I've got to be blunt, then I'll be blunt. I beg of you not to make a fool of yourself, Ivan. Think of your future. Think of your family. Think of me. One thing is sure, you can't afford to marry like this. But if you simply can't control yourself, then go ahead and have your affair and forget it."

Mrs. Banning's final sentences were delivered in harsh tones and rapid words, and directly she had finished she rose and left the room. From force of habit Ivan rose politely, but it was a ghastly politeness and it was in silence that he watched her go. Already he was aware that, had his mother made similar suggestions concerning an infatuation for any other woman, he might have admired her for her modern, unsentimental views. But as applied to Jessup, he was compelled to regard the advice as an unpardonable profanation of a lofty emotion. Too amazed and hurt to be angry, he filled a pipe, lit it, and sank moodily into a chair.

Smarting under his mother's words, he could only think of her as utterly selfish. What did he care about social position? Jessup, he reflected, had proved herself worthy of any sacrifice on his part.

At midnight he was still dragging dejectedly at a pipe that had grown harsh to the tongue and bitter to

the throat. His meditations had reduced themselves to the simple and direct purpose to marry Jessup as soon as he could. His egotism rallied round this one determination. He would show his mother that it was impossible to swerve him.

It was the first time that Banning had formulated so impetuous and so determined a code of action. He had been content to drift with various currents. Social doors had opened to him; his mother's income was enough to provide for both the present and the future, regardless of his own business ventures; and his partnership in the firm of Murray, Cooper & Banning had come about without struggle or straining on his part. His membership in the firm had automatically lifted the latch to considerable business in circles that both the urbane Murray and the gruff Cooper had long coveted, and, under the skillful and experienced direction of the two older partners, these new contracts were steadily being converted into excellent profits for themselves and their younger colleague.

There was nothing of the fighter about Banning. He had none of the accomplished business acumen of Daniel J. Murray, whose efficient management of the organization, combined with the charm with which he could cultivate a client and win his confidence, made his competitors respect him. And Banning had none of the raw, restless imaginative quality of B. F. Cooper, who could bring bankers and promoters together on building projects that no one else had ever thought of. Banning's main contribution to the destinies of the firm was his wide acquaintance, not among

the wealthiest, to be sure, but among substantial people. He was well connected in the matter of clubs, both town and country, and was by temperament and inclination disposed to spend his time socially, rather than in laborious work or in close study. And Murray and Cooper were shrewd enough to know that he could valuably round out the professional qualifications of the firm in just this way. He had rarely been drawn into the firm's real fighting in the incessant contest for business. His duties had been of a more tranquil character.

To-night's issue between himself and his mother had roused a fighting temper in him, and Jessup gleamed before his mind's eye as a prize to be fought for at any cost. This, added to the emotional pitch to which Jessup had lifted him, blotted out any questions concerning her that might have instinctively risen in his mind. It was the first time that he had been very much in love. His affairs had previously been light, selfish, entertaining, rather than imaginative or engrossing. If he had ever contemplated marriage at all, it had invariably been along the conventional lines of the established traditions of his family.

His present serious emotion had wrested him from all these previous tendencies, and he was filled with a passionate defiance.

CHAPTER XI

WHOLLY unaware that Banning and his mother were at odds concerning her, Jessup was gradually becoming accustomed to the idea of marriage. It seemed almost incredible to her that New York, which had received her with coldness and indifference, had actually thawed out to this extent. The knowledge that the big, hard, sparkling, self-centered city had mysteriously taken stock of her, and had rearranged something within itself to feel the need of her and to make room for her, gave her a peculiar satisfaction.

She had moods of tranquil contentment in which Helman's disclosures seemed like the fabrications of a noxious imagination, and she felt eager to take the doubtful stuff of life into her own hands and to shape it resolutely into happier surfaces.

Her reason joined her fancy with alacrity in these moods. What intrinsic bearing, after all, did her origin necessarily have to exert upon her life from now on? Why need the accident of birth tinge any more of her life? Vigorous and bracing resolutions swept at the remaining traces of her feeling of inferiority with cleansing and convincing effect. And then she would turn to the ancestor and to the picture on the table, and would gain a still stronger and more satisfying sense of kinship between herself and them.

There were moments when she lay between con-

sciousness and slumber that by some beneficent decree, the somber ties that had bound her to her own people seemed to dissolve, and authentic ties seemed somehow to have become established between herself and these gracious personalities that had come to dwell with her. Gradually the companionship of these personalities was emerging from the twilight of her own longing through which she had trudged with a whimsical, half-choking chuckle, in search of them. Out of these shadows of her gentle self-deception, it seemed to her that these comprehending images were compassionately exercising a tenderness that brought relief from the monstrous misgivings that had haunted her.

Jessup was spending every available hour over her drawing board. Her interests had swung definitely toward costume work, and in this she was now giving free rein to her imagination. She took imaginary ballets and choruses and fitted them out from startling headgear to fantastic boots according to her fancy. She labored over her sketches as hard as if she were under contract to costume an entire production. She spent hours in the reference room of the public library, studying the modes and fashions of many periods. She studied the mysterious draped figures of ancient Babylon, the togas and tunics of Greece and Rome, the skins and doublets of old Britain. She lost herself in the gorgeous and stately dress of the courts of Louis XIV. and XV., and became absorbed in a world of satins and laces and crinolines. Sumptuous textures and colors revolved through her imagination, and she strove to commit impressions of them to paper.

With energetic and insatiable curiosity, she made the acquaintance of the somber Russian garb, the vivid hues of the Balkans, the shawls and fans and combs of Spanish flirts, the rugged plaids of the Scottish highlands, the bright pinks of languid tropical ladies. Her studies opened up to her a new and fascinating world of ideas. She began to realize how stingily Broadway was really dipping into the world's historic riches, and how ineptly the stage was costuming its players. Possibilities of what could actually be done, and the impulse to try her hand at various daring effects led her irresistibly on.

One day, while in the office of Salant, the producer, she discovered a pile of costume sketches on his table. They were done with a nicety of professional care, but they seemed to Jessup to be lacking in originality.

"How do you like them?" asked Salant.

"They're interesting," she replied.

"Well, they ought to be. They cost enough money," grumbled the producer.

"Who did them?" asked Jessup.

He mentioned the name of the firm, and continued: "I'm not satisfied with this stuff. There doesn't seem to be much kick to them. Look at those red, white, and blue parasols," he growled.

"Not a great deal of sparkle, is there?" said Jessup.

"If my five-year-old nephew couldn't do better, he'd be sent to bed without his supper. By the way, Miss Jessup, there's a good part in this show for you. There's a 'script somewhere around. Here it is. Take

it home with you and read it. See what you think of the part of Elaine."

That night, propped up in bed, Jessup read the manuscript. But during her reading her attention kept straying from the lines and songs of Elaine to the possibilities she could see of costuming different parts. She remembered the hackneyed conceptions of dress that she had seen that day in Salant's office, and perceived interesting chances for improvement. The action was laid on the Bosphorus, and brilliant images were forming in her mind.

She slipped into her dressing-gown and mules, got out her paraphernalia, and began blocking out rough sketches.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, she again became engrossed with her sketching; and now, by daylight, she was able to carry out the color effects. For fully two hours she worked at her drawing-board.

At two that afternoon, she telephoned Salant for an appointment, and half an hour later was at his office. His hat was on his head and his feet were on his desk.

"Well, how do you like your new part?" he demanded.

"It's all right. But that isn't what I want to talk to you about," she answered. "I've been thinking about those sketches I was looking at yesterday."

Salant groaned. "For God's sake, don't remind me of those damn pictures!"

"You don't have to use them," said Jessup, unwrapping her own drawings. "Here's the way to costume some of those numbers," she added confidently.

"Who did 'em?" he asked noncommittally.

"Never mind who did them," said Jessup. "You see there's color here. And novelty. And sparkle. There are ideas here that didn't come out of Cain's storehouse. How do you like them?"

"They look like an amateur's work," said Salant.

"Of course, they're only rough ideas, hastily expressed. They will look very different when they're finished," explained Jessup.

"You can leave them. I don't know if it's anything we want or not. I've got so damn much to think about to-day that I haven't got time to look at pictures." Salant continued, however, to scan the sketches. "There might be some possibilities in them. I don't know. They look kind of fantastic," he added.

"That's exactly what the piece requires," insisted Jessup. "The scene is laid in Stamboul. You don't want a lot of East Side get-up."

"Who did these things? What's the big mystery?" questioned Salant. "Did you?"

Jessup nodded.

"Say, you stick to your own work. You're no artist."

"Very well," replied Jessup. She was accustomed to the gruff ways of theatrical offices, and was not disturbed. "Use the others, if you like."

"Leave them here, and I'll look at them when I've got more time," said Salant.

A few days later Nordahl said to her: "I see you did what I told you to do. You went to art school. You've made progress. You're coming along. I'm

glad to see it. You're on the right track. Keep at it, Miss Jessup. I saw your sketches. You've got ideas. Maybe they'll work out. I don't know. We'll see."

Before Jessup could question Nordahl further, he dashed on.

Encouraged, however, by Nordahl's remarks, Jessup waylaid Salant.

"Come up to the office," said the producer.

Word had leaked out that Salant was casting a new production, and there was a flock of applicants in his outer office when Jessup arrived. His secretary motioned to her, and asked in a whisper:

"Do you want to see Mr. S.?"

"Yes, he's expecting me."

"Go on in. He's there," whispered the secretary. Then she turned to the roomful of people, and said: "Mr. Salant won't be back this afternoon."

Jessup heard a murmur of disappointment. She knew what it meant to chase from one manager's office to another, and to wait for an interview, and be unceremoniously turned away. She had endured her share of that suspense and disappointment, and hoped she would never have to taste its humiliations again.

Salant was at his desk. He did not look up when she entered, but continued to hunt for something in a pile of papers on his desk. She crossed to one of the windows, and stood looking out at the roofs of the Rialto. Then she turned and glanced idly about the office.

The desk was a carved, ornate, kidney-shaped affair. There was a grand piano. On the floor lay a Chinese

rug with grotesque figurations of gold and topaz. There was a fireplace with a large divan in front of it. On the walls were numerous photographic prints, mainly of women, and inscribed in cordial terms to Charles Salant. One was the picture of a musical comedy star of former days, with whom the producer had had a notorious affair. She was a sprightly Viennese whom Broadway had adored for three or four seasons; but since Salant had tired of her, she had descended to the level of occasional appearances in vaudeville and in cabarets. Jessup knew that their affair had broken up, and wondered why he continued to feature her picture.

Looking up, Salant saw Jessup gazing at it intently.

"I see you've found something to interest you," he said.

"Yes," said Jessup, without removing her gaze.

"What became of her?"

The producer shrugged.

"She must have been beautiful," continued Jessup.

"She was."

"I should think you'd want to keep on starring her."

"My dear child," replied Salant, "it would be an impossibility for anyone to keep on starring her. She's too stupid. She had face, figure, and a certain amount of fascination. But mentality—none."

"Weren't you fond of her?" asked Jessup.

"Yes, I liked her," said Salant lightly. "Mental stupidity isn't so bad. But there was an emotional stupidity about her. No temperament at all."

"Really? Then how did she become so popular?"

"There was enough money spent on her to put over a wax image," said Salant. Then his dark eyes grew serious; he folded his arms, and said abruptly: "Look here, little girl, what's all this nonsense of yours?"

"What nonsense?" asked Jessup.

"Sketching costumes. You don't want to get mixed up in that sort of thing. What you want to do is to stick to your knitting. Why, if you keep on anything like the way you've started, you're going to have things your own sweet way before so very long. That is, provided you don't get it into your head that you can do two or three things at the same time. It can't be done. You won't have to fiddle around much longer with bits. I'll take better care of you next fall."

Salant paused. There was a friendly, ingratiating warmth in his studious face, which was free from the sensual coarseness of most of the managers Jessup had seen. The dark skin was clear. There was a determination about the lips and chin, but the rest of the face was almost boyish in appearance.

"Why don't you run up and see me once in a while?" he asked.

"Oh, I've been busy," said Jessup.

"Don't let that school business take up all of your time. It's all right to dabble with art, but don't take it too seriously. You're inclined to be too serious anyway. That's a mistake. You need to play more. You need to laugh more. If you're going to play on the emotions of your audience, you've got to do something to keep your own emotions from going stale. I don't believe you've ever really been in love."

Jessup's even teeth parted in a slight smile. "You don't?" she asked.

"I have my doubts. You've suffered. I can see that. I don't know what you've been through. But whatever it was, it's been a valuable thing to you as an actress. But you need something else, too. You need to enjoy yourself more." Salant was looking at her intently. His arms remained folded. "Why haven't you been in to see me?" he added. "Do you dislike me?"

"No. Why should I?" asked Jessup, flattered by his attentions. She had not suspected that he had given her anything beyond casual professional thought.

"Why have you always avoided me?" he asked.

"There was no reason for pestering you. You're busy. So am I."

"I'm never too busy to see you. You weren't kept waiting to see me to-day, were you?"

"No, I got in ahead of a lot of others."

"Do you know why?"

"Because I had an appointment, I suppose."

"Appointment," laughed Salant. "Do you suppose I see all the people who've got appointments with me? Not by a damn sight. I've left instructions out there never to keep *you* waiting."

The situation fascinated Jessup against her will.

"It's very courteous of you not to barricade the door against me," she said.

"Courteous!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing, kidding me?"

"No. I wouldn't dare. You're too much of a personage," said Jessup with great gravity.

"I can't quite make you out," he said thoughtfully. "And it isn't often that I'm puzzled by a woman. It's my business to know all about them."

"What puzzles you?" asked Jessup.

"The way I've waited," he said. "If you had been anybody else, and I'd wanted you, I'd have done this long ago."

With sharp agility he unfolded his arms, and instantly folded them round Jessup. With her back to the window, there was no chance for her to evade his sudden action. For a moment she did not resist his kisses.

He was making the customary adoring statements.

"You say it all with practiced glibness," Jessup managed at length to interpose.

"That isn't fair," he objected. "This is the hardest I've fallen for anyone in many months. Let me see your purple eyes. What is that perfume you use?"

"Do you like it?" asked Jessup.

"Where do you get it?"

"If I told you, I'd be giving away my technique. You might tell all the other women you're making love to."

"No, I'd buy up all there is, and get it off the market, so that no one but you could ever use it." He stopped talking and inhaled deeply.

"You great big kid," scoffed Jessup, attempting to push him away.

"Damn it, don't try to shove me away."

"You're as immovable as the rock of Gibraltar," panted Jessup. "Are you trying to push me through the window?"

He drew her away from the window. "You love me a little, don't you?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Jessup indifferently.

"Why are you so cold?"

"Am I?"

"You certainly are."

"Like her?" asked Jessup, looking at the picture of Salant's former star.

"No, you're nothing like her. You're full of fire."

"Don't be foolish," she said, turning her face. "I must go."

"No, you've just come. How do I know when I'll be alone with you again?"

"There won't be any lack of others."

"What do I care about any others?" demanded Salant.

"Oh, you've cared about a lot of others."

"What of it?"

"And you'll care about a good many more."

"Well, I never fall for more than one at a time."

"What restraint!" scoffed Jessup.

"I believe in concentration," he declared.

"How long before you usually get tired of a woman?" asked Jessup, interested by his candor.

Salant's hold relaxed. "Say, you ask a devil of a lot of questions!" he exclaimed.

"Can you blame me?"

"I can tell you one thing. I'm not a barn-stormer. I've never played any one-night stands. And before I

get through with a girl, I've bettered her condition in more ways than one. Why, I make them famous. You never hear any scandals about *me*. I never make a promise that I don't carry out. Do you believe that, or have you seen so many dogs on Broadway that you think all the men on this street are alike?"

Jessup scanned the other's eager features. She was comparing him with the quiet, conventional, well-bred Ivan Banning.

"What's the matter?" demanded Salant. "Is there someone else?"

"This is a funny time to ask. I don't suppose it would make any difference to you if there were."

"Not a particle." Again he tightened his grasp. "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you."

An electric buzzer began to snort, and Salant released her and went to the telephone.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. Who? Oh, yes; I'll see him in a minute." He returned the receiver, and sat looking at Jessup from his desk. "There's an author out there that I've got to see. Don't forget what I've told you." He paused, filling the pause with his own thoughts. "You won't regret it. I'll make you happier than you've ever been."

Salant extended his hand as if it were the close of a formal business interview.

"About these sketches?" Jessup inquired, shaking hands. "What have you decided?"

"They're all right," said the producer. "They're a few jumps ahead of anything I've seen lately. I'll put through a voucher right away. You'll have your check in a few days."

CHAPTER XII

HER interview with Charles Salant left Jessup in a state of wonder. His blunt candor differed radically from men's usual technique in similar situations. She could not help feeling a certain respect for his method. She realized that six months ago she might have considered just this sort of proposal as a dignified and justifiable way out of the chorus and into the upper levels of theatrical life. But it was an irony that it should come to her now, she reflected. It struck her as an absurd twist of fate, and left her without much faith in the orderly pattern of human affairs.

She walked hurriedly through the damp, mild twilight with a kind of grave amusement, tinged with a dash of bitterness. She grew aware of a certain quality in her temperament that could cast itself into this adventure with a fierce abandon. For despite the free course her mother had pursued, there had been handed down to Jessup a smoldering accumulation of repressions from generation after generation of pious ancestors, that cried aloud at this moment for release. She realized that again an inner fuse had been touched that had sent a running spark into deep recesses of her being.

From the waiting nozzles of psychic fire-extinguishers, however, drenching streams were automatically

playing upon the inner conflagration, as if the conscience of her mother had lain in wait all these years for this particular day.

Two men hovered before her in persistent images, Banning and Salant, each pleading his separate cause, each striving to inflame her with a different kind of fire, each the embodiment of a different idea of romance.

The love-ideas of these two men were totally different. Salant's kisses clung to her mouth with a mysterious and disturbing tang that Banning's had never projected. Salant had inspired a delicious fear, had made her see a blur of Oriental colors and feel the brush of strange, enervating winds. The usual terms and phrases of resistance had deserted her, and left her wondering and curious. She had felt indefinably reckless in his arms.

A check came promptly in payment for her sketches. It was for a thousand dollars.

Jessup knew that it did not represent Salant's notion of the value of her designs. He had belittled them and had called them amateurish. It could mean only one thing—an initial payment for expected favors.

She reread the brief note, complimenting her upon the originality of her ideas, but warning her not to let anything interfere with her stage career. There was no reference to personal issues. It was a polite, friendly, gracious note.

Already Jessup was thinking of a dozen places where portions of this unexpected money could be spent to

advantage. Numerous charge accounts at different shops were overdue and she was being pressed for payment. Collectors had called at her apartment. One firm was threatening to sue. . . . She had submitted her drawings in good faith; they had been accepted and paid for. No other considerations, no implicit understanding, had entered into the deal. She had made no promises. Salant had no authority to jump to any conclusions.

On her way to the *matinée*, she went to her bank, indorsed the check, and deposited it.

If Jessup felt any misgivings about accepting it, they were set still more at rest when she opened her newspaper the next morning and turned to the theatrical news. To her surprise, she discovered a picture of herself, two columns in width. The story recited that Charles Salant, the producing manager, had discovered a genius for costume designing in Miss Jessup, one of his players, and had engaged her to design costumes for the first of his fall productions. The press-agent had spun a romantic yarn. It predicted a "revolution" in theatrical costuming as a result of the startling originality of the young actress's ideas, and quoted her at length as to her ideas of art and her criticisms of prevailing practices.

"Well, whoever wrote this had his nerve!" gasped Jessup. She was addressing the ancestor, who was gazing at her with placid eyes.

But it was impossible to be angry. It began dawning upon her that she was actually embarked upon a career that she had craved. She was no longer just an

actress, sprung from the chorus. She had acquired dignity. Overnight she had reached a prominence that others laboriously strove to attain for years.

Her thoughts reverted to Salant. There was something pretty white about him, she mused. He had not been compelled to give her any such send-off. By this announcement to the press he had established her identity as an artist.

It is remarkable what a flamboyant, exaggerated newspaper story can sometimes accomplish. Three New York newspapers, two press syndicates, and a magazine telephoned Jessup the same day for appointments to photograph her and interview her. Several prominent theatrical managers invited her to their offices. Her name was placed on the mailing-lists of a score of exclusive costumers, modistes, hotels, and shops. She was invited to address clubs and classes.

It became clear to Jessup that she did not have to remain on the stage in order to be sure of an earning-power. A series of rough sketches, which she had been invited to submit to another producer, were approved on the spot with but few criticisms, and she was offered an attractive commission to prepare the finished designs. But rather than withdraw from her part in the musical comedy, she decided to remain until the close of the season.

During the week's rapid developments, Banning had telephoned Jessup once or more each day. He had enthused over the newspaper reports of her work. He had begged her to see him, but Jessup, on the plea

of being inordinately busy, had kept putting him off. Compelled to go to Ohio for a few days with Daniel J. Murray, head of his firm, for a conference on a city-planning project, Banning had importunately begged Jessup to see him before he went, but again she had interposed excuses.

She felt that she had to have time to think, time to orientate herself and to get her emotional bearings. Ivan's proposal of marriage had brought her to a sharp pause. His attitude of uncompromising loyalty to her impressed her more deeply than anything that had ever come into her life. She felt irresistibly drawn to him, and the knowledge that such a love as his existed, filled her with an exultant thankfulness. It was more than she had ever expected; it seemed more than she had any right to expect.

But her exultation was charged with inexorable misgivings. She questioned her right to join the doubtful elements of her life to Ivan's destinies. Inescapable forebodings were issuing danger signals. Recalling the deceit she had used, and the pretense she had practiced, she wondered if she dared heighten the risk of discovery by entering the intimate relations of marriage. In this despairing mood, it seemed a towering ingratitude to repay Ivan's loyalty by yielding to a marriage that was sure to be surrounded at the very outset by menacing factors that might resolve themselves at any moment into disaster.

The more she brooded over her dilemma, the closer she approached the conclusion that she had no right to commit herself to a course that was headed straight

for a region of potential calamity. It seemed better never to see Ivan again than deliberately to lead him on into this peril zone. She thought of telling him everything she knew about her origin, but quickly dismissed that alternative as impossible.

During her fearful meditations, the thought of Charles Salant presented itself repeatedly. She had written him, thanking him for the check, but had not called again at his office. Suddenly she began wondering desperately if her entire problem could not be settled by giving herself blindly to Salant. She knew that he was infatuated with her, that he had had his fill of women who were obvious and acquiescent, and that if she gave him half a chance, he would seize it.

Fascinated by this possibility of cutting herself off from Ivan in this fashion, she contemplated it with fixed absorption. The brutal fact of the kind of blood that was in her rose relentlessly before her. It seemed folly to try to be something that she knew she was not. It seemed criminal to involve the man she cared for. In the end, she mused sternly, it might be the kindest thing she could do for Ivan never to see him again.

That afternoon Jessup walked unannounced into Salant's office. She wore a smart tight-fitting toque of gray velvet, and a long, snug coat with a high squirrel collar. A brisk walk through the clear, cold air had sent the blood leaping to her cheeks.

"Hello!" he exclaimed with pleasure. He took both of her cold gloved hands into his, and pressed them warmly. "How have you been and how are you? But I don't have to ask. You look good to me."

Salant's dark, moody face grew boyish as he stood admiring her. The gloved hands he was grasping acted upon him like batteries. The sluggish tide of his blood quickened with a rush.

"Sit down," he said. "It's a long time since I've seen you. How long is it?" He perched himself on the edge of his desk.

"I've been terribly busy," replied Jessup. "It's all your fault, for putting that story in the paper. I've had mighty little privacy ever since. But it's all very exciting. I'm designing costumes for three new productions. It was good of you to start things going. I dropped in to say 'Thank you.' "

"So you like the new work, do you?"

"Love it."

"You've got the drive of an engine. The lackadaisical dolls that drift in here can hardly climb a flight of stairs any more." He inspected Jessup with pleasure. "If someone hadn't given you a chance to blow off steam, something would certainly have burst," he laughed.

"I felt like a lot of lightning," said Jessup.

Salant lapsed into silence. He sat staring vaguely at the fading light in the window. Jessup perceived an air of petulance and discouragement on his face. When she spoke, there was a note of sympathy in her voice. Salant detected it.

"Has anything gone wrong?" she asked.

"No, nothing special. But once in a while I get most hellishly sick of this business," he complained.

"Really? I thought you adored it."

"There'd be more fun in it if one didn't have to keep an eye everlastingly on the box-office. But as long as one has to pander to a lot of half-wits, what chance is there to do anything artistic? Giving the public what the public wants! The public is full of soup!"

Jessup was caught by his tone of revolt.

"Do you know," he continued, "sometimes I can hardly resist the temptation to cut loose as a critic and hammer the starch out of one of my own productions. For once I should enjoy telling the truth. A publisher of books, even though he has to rely for his big profits on driveling sentimentality, is able to purge his soul every now and again by publishing something really fine and standing the loss. But the cost of producing any kind of a theatrical piece, even a comedy of manners with the smallest of casts, runs into thousands. With this result—that in every production we have to strive for the elements of a best-seller. We've got to supply the demand for sex thrills, but must do it in acts and words that will not cause the police department to close the show. We have to be suggestive and slinking. We have to shock by innuendo."

"Well, why don't you clean house?" asked Jessup.

Salant made a hopeless gesture. "I have too much money invested in this business. Besides, I'm not concerned with public morals. It isn't my business to uplift. It's my business to entertain. And in order to entertain and show profits, I've got to cater to a salacious public without offending its scruples. You'll find out quick enough if you go on with designing. You've got to create something seductive. No matter whether

you're designing a pretty little dress, or a gorgeous gown, your object has got to be a sex-challenge. The finery has to imply the flesh."

Jessup flushed. "There was no such motive in the sketches you bought from *me*," she said.

"That's why I had to turn them over to some hardened old professionals to touch up and complete," said Salant pleasantly.

"So that's what you did? Then my ideas didn't appeal to you so much after all?"

"They lacked just a little of the necessary tang, that's all. But you'll get the hang of it."

"Don't you suppose I have any ideals?" demanded Jessup.

"Like most beginners in this business," replied the producer, "you have entirely too many ideals. I'm not without ideals either. But I have to keep them subordinated to practical requirements. And that's likely to be a rather tedious process. It takes time and means painful jolts. I'm trying to show you a short-cut."

"You're very kind," said Jessup.

"I've been in this business a good many years and haven't many illusions about it left."

"I should hate to think all that about the stage," said Jessup thoughtfully. "I should think you would be the last person in the world to attack it."

"I'm not attacking it. I'm simply looking facts in the face," said Salant. "I'm trying to help you, if you'll let me. You can trust me. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Don't be suspicious."

"I'm not," said Jessup, but her tone left him unconvinced.

"Now look here. I want you to trust me," he said. "I'll manage your affairs for you. I'll see that you get what's coming to you."

Jessup nodded guardedly.

"And what about me?" asked Salant.

"I don't know," said Jessup. "I've got to think."

"What do you have to think about?"

"Oh, a lot of things."

"All right," said Salant with a gesture that seemed to denote a willingness to bide his time. "Think it all over. When will I see you again?"

"I can't tell."

"I want to know. To-morrow?"

"Perhaps."

"Here's the telephone number at my apartment." Salant scribbled a number on a pad of paper and handed it to her.

Long and somber thoughts moved through Jessup's mind on her way home. The bluntness of Salant's final statement echoed in her ears.

She pressed on through the crowds. The lingering daylight of late afternoon pierced the cool March air in vivid contrast with the early dusks that had descended for months. There was an unmistakable feeling of spring in the air. Jessup noted it with vague resentment. It disturbed her to think of the sunny

days that were coming, of a bright and glittering world. In her moodiness she preferred continued greys, and mists, and twilights. She felt hunted and pursued by inexorable forces. New York, which had drawn her to its gates, holding out the promise of a refuge from her fearful and relentless introspections, had turned upon her with a devilish and laughing ferocity.

Jangling in her mind were Salant's parting words, but she was surprisedly aware that she did not resent his suggestion. At least Charles Salant did not stumble childishly through a world of pretty illusions; at least he knew what was what and was willing to deal with facts; and he had paid her the compliment of making no pretense of limpid love-making. This man spun no flimsy, illusory, sweet-sounding theories of life. He held in his knowing hands the strong, hard threads of realities. She liked him for it, admired him, felt confidence in him. This bland, worldly, competent adviser would practice no concealment or deception with her. She was convinced that she could trust him.

It was a relief to Jessup to reflect that here was a man whom she could believe. Where others palavered and moralized, and messed things up in their ignorance, it dawned on her that there was a basic honesty about Salant that she could rely upon. The candor with which he had talked to her about his relations with women had been something of a shock, but it had enabled her to know exactly where she stood and what she might expect if she became his mistress. She was arrested by the man's uncommon freedom from the usual romantic gush. It raised Salant in her esteem,

An exotic glamour colored his proposals. There was a daring quality about Salant's views, a persuasive eloquence that made them acceptable to certain deep-rooted tendencies that lay imbedded in herself. There was a courageous defiance of established traditions that gave her a surreptitious satisfaction and contrasted sharply with Banning's demand that she cross the threshold of marriage into doubtful realms from whose invisible recesses came indistinct warnings.

The two men presented themselves in her meditations as the protagonists of vastly different ideas and demands. Ivan Banning with his inherent nicety, represented the sensitive and sheltered product of an established social order, jealous of its traditions and suspicious of those not born to its privileges. He had come to her like a gracious ambassador from another land, led on impetuously by his love, making brave promises of an affection that would last. He offered rescue from the dark anonymity that pressed upon her; he came bearing the momentous gift of a name.

Salant, on the contrary, offered mysterious riches, unrelated to the vested rights and privileges of Banning's world. The attar and myrrh of Salant's offerings had not ripened in the sanctity of the social sun. His world represented luxurious adventure beneath the silken whispering of strange tents.

Salant would tire of her; he would turn in time to someone else; he would pass indifferently out of her life; but he would not harm her. His eagerness for her would subside; he would turn to other fascinations; but he would not make her suffer. Blurred and dreamy

visions of soothing luxuries floated before her. Across the path of her musings drifted nebulous billows of color—smoky blues, creamy greens, golden mists that swayed and beckoned. She sighed contentedly.

When Jessup entered her apartment, the telephone was ringing. She drew back, realizing that it was probably Banning. She did not want to hear his voice. But the bell kept ringing insistently, as if breaking in upon her temptation with volley upon volley of peremptory appeal.

She took the receiver stealthily off its hook and placed it on the table to silence the bell.

Turning, she found the ancestor looking at her enigmatically.

“Well?” she demanded with impatient defiance.

Her gaze crossed to the limpid eyes of the picture of the woman on her table.

“Well?” she repeated in the same voice.

She went to the window and stood looking at the street, at the uncommunicative houses and patches of light from window-panes. She flattened her hand against the chilly surface of her window, and strove to revive her contented vision of billows of seductive colors; but her nerves did not respond. A sense of being alone pressed into her mind. She could stand it to be hurt, but she could not endure being alone. The thought of being alone again after Salant was through with her alarmed her. She imagined herself becoming another’s mistress after Salant was done with her, and after that another’s. She saw a gloomy avenue of descent, with youth gradually leaving her, and the years

thickening about her. Terrified, she saw herself headed in the direction her mother had taken.

With a hunted cry, she sprang to the telephone.

"Hello," she called. "Hello! Hello! Hello!" she cried with sudden agony, in a voice that sounded strange to her own ears.

Banning hardly recognized her voice.

"Is that you, Diana?" he asked. "I just got back to town."

"Yes," she said with a moan of relief. "Don't you know my voice?"

"I wasn't sure. It sounds a little strange. Have you been ill?" demanded Banning anxiously. "I was just on the point of hanging up. I thought you weren't there. How are you?" he asked with concern.

"Lonely," said Jessup. "Lonely," she repeated with terror.

"I'll jump into a car and be there in a few minutes!" exclaimed Banning.

"Oh, will you?" asked Jessup, struggling to keep her voice from sounding pitiful. "Please hurry. I need you so," said Jessup.

Then she disconnected quickly to hide the distrac-
tion that shook her voice.

CHAPTER XIII

IVAN BANNING jumped into a car, and gave the driver the familiar address on East Twenty-seventh Street. All day he had worried about Jessup, and as soon as his train arrived he had rushed to a telephone booth. The moment she had answered, he knew that something was wrong and that she needed him. Various surmises leaped through his mind. He wished to God that she were off the stage, and more carefully sheltered. He marveled at the pluck with which she had fought her way through the obstacles that had bristled in the path of her ambitions. He resented the attitude of his mother toward the brave efforts of this unusual girl.

He bounded up Jessup's stairs, impatient to be with her.

"Diana!" he exclaimed, grasping her hands, and scanning her face with concern. "Has anything happened?"

"I was afraid," said Jessup.

"Of what?"

"Oh, I suppose it's silly of me."

"Not at all. What frightened you?"

"Everything. The streets—the future—life——"

"My dear girl, you're just nervous. You're work-

ing too hard. You're doing twice as much work as you ought to be doing. You should be more sheltered. You need to be taken care of. I won't have any more of this. It isn't right. I'm going to look after you, whether you want me to or not. You shouldn't be living here—this place isn't nearly good enough for you. Things have got to be changed and now is the time. Don't argue with me any more, Diana. You shouldn't be living like this all by yourself. I can't stand it. We're going to be married. It's nonsense to wait any longer."

Banning's arms were about her, and he was saying: "We're not going to wait any longer. It isn't right. You'll marry me, won't you, Diana?"

"But are you sure you want me to?" asked Jessup doubtfully.

"I was never so sure of anything in my life," he declared with finality.

"You'll get tired of me."

"I couldn't possibly."

"You'll regret it," said Jessup.

"No, there isn't any danger of that. I'll never regret it, and neither will you."

"Your people will try to turn you against me."

"I'd like to see them try!"

"Your mother never liked me."

"She'll be crazy about you when she really knows you."

"I couldn't bear to have anything happen. I'd rather say good-bye to you now and never see you again," said Jessup soberly.

"You're nervous. You're wrought up. Nothing can possibly come between us," contended Banning.

"You don't know. Why, I'm almost a stranger to you."

"I know everything about you that I need to know. Don't be afraid."

"Would you love me no matter what happened?" asked Jessup with intensity.

"I'll worship you always," he answered. "I promise. I don't want you to feel the slightest doubt. Nothing can possibly change my feeling for you."

"But you hardly know me."

"I know every mood. And one look at this picture of your mother, one look at this portrait, and I know all the rest."

Jessup's voice was faint when she replied.

"But they're only pictures."

"Only pictures?" laughed Banning indulgently. "Why, they're more eloquent than a whole shelf of biographies." His gaze went from the one to the other. "They tell the whole story."

Now that they were headed straight in the direction of marriage, Jessup was as ready as Ivan to eliminate further delays. Having hovered momentarily near the verge of confessing her deception to him, but having let the sudden impulse pass, Jessup no longer considered telling. It was now too late, and she was convinced that it would be folly to cheat herself out of her chance at happiness by raking up the past.

But during the reading of the marriage service, when

it came to the passage: "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it," a peculiar faintness moved through Jessup; and the pause at the end of the passage seemed almost intolerably prolonged, and she felt a grotesque impulse to speak. But her tongue felt tied and presently the fluent voice was again reading, and in a moment she was solemnly pronounced to be Ivan Banning's wife.

It was a fantastic sort of ceremony for a man like Banning to have figured in as a principal. Jessup had been "given away" by Nordahl, the director, who had put her through her first paces in a Broadway chorus, who had helped her into a more ambitious rôle, and who had urged her to study art. The other witness was Doris, Banning's sister, who had arrived only a few days before from Europe, and gave every indication of being delighted with the romantic novelty that had surprised her on her return.

"This is what I call sensible," she declared, as they came out of the church. "Don't you think so, Mr. Nordahl?"

"It's all right. It's all right," asserted Nordahl with the same invariable brevity and intensity with which he conducted rehearsals at Bryant Hall. "A lot of horseplay is all wrong. I don't believe in it. A thing like this should be regarded as an incident. Just a happy incident. No need of a lot of fuss. I know. I've been married three times. It's a gamble. Always

a gamble. But you'll have to pardon me. I've got to run. I've got a new show on my hands. We open in another week."

Jessup and Banning both protested.

"But you've got to stay for our wedding breakfast, Mr. Nordahl!" exclaimed Banning.

"I can't. I'm sorry. You must excuse me. My time isn't my own. I'm the worst slave on Broadway. I don't get time to eat." Nordahl turned to Jessup. "You know how it is, Miss Jessup. You know I'd stay if I could. I'm fond of you. You know that. I discovered you. You're going to be happy. I congratulate you. Both of you. But I've got to run."

He rushed off, and disappeared into a yellow taxi.

"Isn't he a darling?" exclaimed Doris. "Is he always in such a hurry?"

"I never knew him to be otherwise," laughed Jessup. "I warned you," she said to Ivan, "that he would rush right away."

They drove to the Hotel Plaza. It was a sunny day in late March. Motors sparkled brightly on the clean streets.

"Happy?" asked Doris.

"Yes," answered Jessup and Banning in unison.

"I love your rings," Doris chattered on, squeezing Jessup's hand. "Mon Dieu, you are stunning. Where *do* you buy your clothes? I had quite forgotten that one can get duds in New York."

Doris had a way of swaying when she talked. Temperamental fires smoldered in her chocolate-colored eyes. Her dark hair was bobbed, her manner mer-

curial, but her figure threatened to become robust, like her mother's.

"You devils," she continued gayly. "I never suspected that you had anything like this up your sleeves. You must wire mother."

"I'll do that," said Banning, whose mother was in Hot Springs.

Jessup, knowing that Ivan had timed their marriage to have it occur during his mother's absence, had no illusions as to how Mrs. Banning would receive the news. Indeed, it was a pleasant surprise to her that Doris had lent herself so enthusiastically to the project.

"It's a pity you two aren't starting directly on your honeymoon," said Doris.

"That's got to wait for another month or so," replied her brother. "Diana insists on staying with the show until it closes."

"Hang on to your independence," said Doris to Jessup. "Don't let yourself be tamed. But with a reasonable amount of independence, there's no reason why being a wife can't provide some of the thrill of being a mistress."

Ivan frowned.

"Is that what Paris did to you?" he asked.

Ivan's mother did not take the trouble to reply to her son's telegram announcing his marriage. She was angered, but not surprised. But when she discovered in one of the New York papers a story of the event, including a picture of Jessup, and an exaggerated account of her fame as an actress and her talent as a

costume designer, and of Banning's wealth and social position, she clipped the story and mailed it to Ivan's office with sneering marginal comments.

Pained by this communication from his mother, Banning took care not to let Jessup see it. He intended to shield her from definite knowledge of his mother's stubborn resentment. He could see trouble ahead, but with Doris's breezy aid he was confident that the unhappy condition could at length be controlled.

A suitable and attractive apartment was soon found in East Sixty-sixth Street, and Banning and Jessup were now busy furnishing it. They had already picked up a number of odd pieces of furniture, and now, with the apartment available in another fortnight, they lost no time placing orders for the rest of their furniture. They had decided upon an English and Italian treatment, and their hunt for appropriate chairs, tables, cabinets, rugs, and draperies, occupied most of Jessup's free time. They kept an eye on the various auctions and there they managed to get possession of a number of unusual old pieces.

But these auctions had a singularly distressing effect on Jessup. The crowds of dealers, collectors, interior decorators, and idlers, eying like so many vultures the contents of homes that had to be broken up, staring at possessions that it had taken someone a lifetime to accumulate, rarely failed to fill her with a sense of pity and compassion. It seemed so unfair to her, these miserable tricks that life played on people. Nothing had ever impressed her more clearly with the futility of human striving than to see the entire contents of

homes knocked down to the highest bidder and carted away. Here were the careful, painstaking acquisitions of generations, torn from their cherished places and scattered to the very winds in a few relentless hours.

It made her pause; it made her wonder if the home that she and Ivan were so carefully establishing might be headed in the somber direction of a similar destiny. She thought of the scrimping and planning and scheming that had gone into these sorry exhibits of goods, and of the struggle of human beings to express themselves in these trappings of domesticity. Gazing through and beyond these household arrays, she perceived quests that had penetrated the market-places of the world in fumbling endeavors to put houses in order. She thought of the dusty, brooding, Oriental bazaars, the stalls of remote rug-weavers and cabinet-workers, the wheels of potters, the innumerable counters and booths at which these auction-room arrays had been haggled for, and bargained for, and from which they had been lugged home over leagues of travel.

She thought of the struggles of these successive owners to keep hold of their treasures. She had visions of the various tragedies that had wound up in the auction-room—bankruptcy, death, and the drifting apart of people who at length could no longer countenance the presence of objects that reminded them of ties that had grown intolerable.

It seemed to Jessup at times that she would have to rush out of sight of these substances of tragedy, out into the sunshine. A listlessness crept over her; it seemed wrong to be rounding out her own home with

these pickings and snatchings from the belongings of others. Sometimes it seemed to her that a curse would surely follow objects thus obtained.

But the fever of acquisition would stream insidiously through her, and entice her into making bid after bid. But during the lulls in her bidding, she would often sit with gloomy forebodings, wondering if she too would ever come to this, and if her own carefully collected things would ever be seized and catalogued, and put under the hammer.

Fragmentary scenes of imaginary dissension between her husband and herself would enact themselves in her mind; the knife-blades of hostile dialogue would glisten and glitter in her imagination; incredible bursts of anger would rush into involuntary action, until her nerves would tighten and her face grow stern.

At one such moment, Banning happened to be looking at her.

"What is it, Diana?" he demanded, startled.

Recalled by his voice, Jessup's mood changed, and she smiled, and said:

"I'm all right. Why do you ask?"

"Something seemed to be troubling you," he answered with concern.

"Do you think I did a foolish thing to bid so high on that mirror?"

"Not at all."

Jessup sighed. "It's just what I've been wanting. But think of all the faces, all the moods, it has reflected. I'm glad that the glass is so blurred. It must

have shown no end of women that they were growing old."

"It will be a long time before you could discover anything like that in it," smiled Banning. "They're putting up number fifty-nine," he added. "That piece of brocade you were looking at. Do you want it?"

"No. Let's get out into the sun."

The bright, lucent afternoon had deepened into a brownish grey when they emerged into the street.

"It must be late. I had no idea we were in there so long," said Jessup. "What time have you?"

"It's only four."

"Do you have to go back to the office?"

"I think I'd better. I have some mail to sign. Won't you come along? I'll be ready to start home shortly."

"No, I have a little shopping to do."

"Then I'll see you for dinner. By the way," added Banning, seizing this as an opportune moment to mention a subject that he had been deferring. "Mother is back from Hot Springs. She asked about you and wants us to have dinner with her to-morrow evening. I think we'd better go."

It was Mrs. Banning's first sign of recognition of Jessup since the marriage.

"Have you seen her?" asked Jessup in surprise.

"She telephoned yesterday. I ran up for a moment in the afternoon."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I'm telling you now."

"Did you *ask* your mother to invite me?"

"No. She spoke of it herself. But I've got to get over to the office. Have to see Cooper on an important matter before he gets away. I can't argue things with you now." Again Banning looked at his watch.

"I'm not arguing."

"I mean that I can't stop to answer a lot of questions just now. Suppose I telephone mother that we'll dine with her to-morrow. May I?"

"It wouldn't hurt her to run in and see *me*," Jessup answered.

"I know it wouldn't, dear. But as long as things are more or less strained, I thought this dinner idea might break the ice. What do you say?"

Jessup hesitated. "It puts me in an embarrassing position," she said.

"Oh, there's no need to feel that way about it," replied Banning.

"How can I help it?"

Banning's hold tightened on her arm. "I understand exactly how you feel," he said. "I can't tell you how sorry I am. But sooner or later, and somehow or other, the thing has got to be ironed out, and we've all got to get on a reasonable basis with each other, and this seems to me to be as good a time as any. We must, at least, concede that mother has made the first move. And now let's show her that there aren't any hard feelings."

"*You* have dinner with her," answered Jessup. "There's no reason why you and she should be estranged. But there really isn't a particle of sense in my trotting along. I'm absolutely nothing to your mother; she's made that perfectly clear."

A look of disappointment settled upon Banning's face. "You'll feel better about it when you think it over," he said, and started away.

The look of pain on her husband's face followed Jessup for the rest of the afternoon. Already she was sorry that she had spoken so bluntly. If it would make Ivan any happier, how could she refuse to go? Besides, it was precisely the sort of thing she had expected; but Ivan's off-handed manner of speaking of it had ruffled her a little.

While these thoughts were revolving through her mind, suddenly they sharpened into more angular outlines. Why should she condone this woman's offenses merely because she was Ivan's mother? Her face darkened, for now she was thinking of her own mother, and of the offense which, if Ivan ever found it out, would doubtless cause him to turn from her as if from something vicious and corrupt and defiled. It came to her that the only way she could hold him was by means of a carefully fabricated system of deception.

Once more the city which had loomed round her of late in soft, gray outlines resumed a hard and forbidding appearance. Its massive bulwarks of buildings, its guarded doors, the austerity of even its tabernacles and cathedrals with their bayonetlike spires, all seemed to be closing in upon her. The apparent friendliness of the city had only been another illusion. The feeling that she was welcome and that the city was making a place for her in its hard bosom, no longer deceived her. It was all illusion, phantasm, and mirage. Her surroundings were hostile and suspicious of her. New York seemed clairvoyantly to perceive

that there was something wrong with her. The shadowy something that she had striven with all her courage and energy to live down and stamp out of herself, had stuck to her with imperious tenacity.

These thoughts were spinning through her mind, and were swiftly rousing and reviving the old fighting qualities that had lately been lying dormant. Her red lips parted with a certain eagerness: her sensitive hands doubled up in their ivory-tinted gloves into fists: and her eyes sparkled with purplish electric currents.

Again she felt like lightning; but this time she knew where to strike.

At dinner that evening, Jessup's mood was jovial. She had reached a decision on her way home, and it satisfied her. It had taken shape out of mists of uncertainties and misgivings, which had receded the moment she had made her decision. Her relief was reflected by her gayety.

"You are in good spirits to-night," said Banning. "You don't regret any of your bidding at the auction?"

"No, and I'm not going to be disturbed by the thought of all those Italian women who saw themselves growing old in that mirror!" she replied.

"It's not such a tragedy to grow old," he returned.

"Take your mother, for instance," continued Jessup. "Having attained a graceful middle age, she's to be envied."

Banning looked up suddenly at the change in Jessup's attitude.

"It must be a comfort," she added, "to reflect that one's youthful inexperience, follies, and upsets are

behind one, and that the poise, good judgment and common sense of the fifties have been safely acquired."

"Yes, I think you're quite right," agreed Banning, concealing his delight at Jessup's respectful and generous views. "Have you given any more thought to mother's invitation?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'll go."

"I haven't said much, but I can't help holding it against her the way she ignored our marriage. It made me pretty hot at the time. Confound it, she ought to have been overjoyed at my getting you."

"I don't blame her," Jessup made haste to reply. "She knew so little about me, and I made so few overtures to her myself, and the thing happened so abruptly that I don't wonder in the least that she felt more or less alarmed for your future."

Ivan looked pleased. "That's big and generous of you," he answered.

"Well, that's exactly the situation. I consider myself to blame, and I'm going to try to make amends."

"You're a regular brick," declared Ivan with enthusiasm. "Once mother knows you, she will realize what a lucky dog I am and what a lot of reason she has to be offering thanks that I got you."

He beamed at Jessup with relief, for the wall of restraint between themselves and his mother had troubled him deeply.

"Then we'll go," he said with satisfaction.

He had responded to Jessup's tactics precisely as she had expected. Yet the certainty, now that it had been established, that he was willing, even eager, to have her efface herself before this woman who had

deliberately inflicted deep and permanent wounds upon her, left Jessup with a secretly diminished respect for Ivan and a secretly heightened antipathy for his mother.

"I'll tell her we're coming," he said, going to the telephone.

"Remember me to her cordially," said Jessup.

Throughout the conversation that followed, Jessup's face was an imperturbable mask. The telephone assumed the character of an intruder and conspirator in her home. A resentment against the object that made possible this fostering of the relations between Ivan and his mother, took possession of Jessup. Ivan's brief, fragmentary remarks denoted a needless guardedness on his part, and Jessup had to conclude that the conversation was taking a turn not meant for her ears. There was a cautiousness, a brevity about Ivan's speech that struck Jessup as an affront, and stamped the thought into her mind that there was more of an understanding between the two than she had supposed. These meager phrases and sentences without endings, were as irritating as if the other two had been whispering together while in the same room with her.

But as she finished her coffee, toyed with her cigarette, and listened, her face remained masked and impassive. . . .

A forgiving peck on Jessup's cheek from the lips of Ivan's mother conveyed the sign of welcome and of truce.

"Ivan dear, it was rather brutal of you to put Diana here to all the inconveniences of such a hurried mar-

riage," declared Mrs. Banning, turning a look of smiling reproof upon her son.

"Can you blame me?" he demanded, putting his arm around Jessup.

"Of course not," replied his mother politely, but without enthusiasm.

"The guilt," put in Jessup in a voice of conciliation, "was largely my own."

"Still," sighed Ivan's mother, "if I had only kept in closer touch with this young man's affairs, and if I had invited more of his confidence, a run-away match would hardly have been considered necessary. However, the deed is done. Consider yourselves spanked and forgiven."

She spoke as if she had carefully rehearsed the reproving but benevolent speech. Following it, there was a moment of painful silence which was presently broken by Banning, who inquired if Doris was about.

"Doris might almost still be abroad for all I see of her," complained Mrs. Banning with a neglected air. "She rushes in and rushes out."

"It does her good to keep busy," said her son.

Mrs. Banning sank heavily back against her inevitable cushions, which her son was adjusting for her.

"I can't say that I can work up much enthusiasm about this crowd that she's running with," she continued. "She had an artist of some kind here for dinner the other night. An unkempt, ratty sort of fellow, who kept apologizing for his need of a shave. At the dinner table—just fancy. It seems that he wants to paint my portrait. Imagine sitting for *him*."

Throughout dinner Mrs. Banning trained the guns of her disparagement and sarcasm upon the crowd that Doris "ran with" since her return from abroad. She isolated one specimen after another of these artistic folk and found fault with them. She displayed her contempt for the Bohemian life in general and enlarged from numerous angles upon her disapproval of dabblers in the arts. While the attack was meant for Jessup, it was politely directed at others. Jessup was amused and pretended not to be aware that she was being hammered. Ivan became nettled, and once he burst out:

"But, good heavens, mother, you sent Doris abroad for no other purpose than to dabble in art! Surely you can't expect her to have a great deal in common with a lot of corn-fed business men or inane society women with nothing on their minds but trouble with their servants and the latest scandals."

"I'm disappointed in her taste," retorted Ivan's mother. "A soiled shirt is not necessarily a sign of genius, and vulgar language at a respectable table does not necessarily prove any ability to produce masterpieces. When I see Doris fraternizing with people like that, it makes me realize that I have failed as a mother."

"Well, it's doubtless only a passing interest," replied Ivan. "She'll get over it."

"I wonder," answered Mrs. Banning portentously. "It wouldn't surprise me to see her marry one of these fellows."

Banning writhed under the implication of his mother's last sentence. His face flushed with anger. He considered the blow a deliberate foul. But before he

could reply, he was relieved to hear the sound of Jessup's voice. It was amiable and under perfect control. She said:

"I can quite understand a mother's anxiety that her daughter should marry well. If I had a daughter I should consider that I had neglected my duty if she did not marry into the highest possible station."

There was a ring of unquestionable sincerity, of grave and inflexible intent in Jessup's words. They arrested Mrs. Banning's attention because they were charged with a glinting ambition, with an unmistakable respect for the established order which the older woman adored.

"Exactly," said Ivan quickly.

"It is an excellent theory," said Mrs. Banning with a malice that did not penetrate her tone. "But in practice it does not usually work out so well. Children are too headstrong. Usually they don't pay the slightest heed to the wishes of their parents."

Ivan was trying in vain to conceal his fury.

"That is to say," continued Ivan's mother, "if anything so conventional as marriage could attract Doris. These young moderns seem to think that high thinking and loose living go together."

"To me," said Jessup reflectively, "marriage is the only thinkable alternative."

"Yes, I dare say," rejoined her mother-in-law loftily.

Ivan looked at his wife with a sudden tenderness that made him ignore his mother's final statement.

CHAPTER XIV

HIGHLY satisfied with the tactfulness with which Jessup had conducted herself during the trying ordeal, Banning surveyed with pleasure the less formidable family problem that was now presented. He saw no reason why the truce that had been established between the two women should not develop gradually into friendly if not cordial relations.

Jessup was glad that she had contrived with apparent success to carry her intentions into action, and no longer questioned her ability to maintain the relations necessary to the accomplishment of her ends. She congratulated herself upon having made a fair start before her marriage, in a career other than acting; it gave her confidence in herself; it banished the feeling, which would have been intolerable, that she was attaching herself like a parasite to the Bannings.

Her social life had expanded rapidly since her marriage; she and Ivan spent a week-end with the Coopers at their home near White Plains, and another with the Murrays at Forest Hills. Jessup liked the members of Ivan's firm, and contact with their family life was something new and agreeable to her. Invitations to teas, luncheons, and suppers came in quick succession, and Jessup had met a dozen of Doris's friends, including a dramatic critic, a sculptor of sorts,

a magazine editor, a singer or two, and a flock of social idlers, male and female, who affected sophistication and consumed one another's bootleg liquor.

One night after Doris and her hilarious crowd had left the apartment, Banning turned to Jessup with a gesture of relief, and said: "Thank God they're gone. There's no sense in keeping you up like this until all hours. Doris ought to have more sense."

"It's all right," said Jessup. "I'm not tired. I'm glad that Doris feels free to bring people around."

"She takes too much for granted," objected Banning. "Why, she'll turn this place into a madhouse if we let her. I'm not so fond of that crowd of hers."

"They're interesting," replied Jessup.

"That dramatic critic reminds me of a pussy-cat. It's absurd to permit an individual like that to presume to sit in judgment over a play which costs money to produce."

"You seem to be more interested in Nan Sedley," replied Jessup.

"That singer? She's rather amusing. But she wears too much junk."

"Yes, she gets herself up to look more or less like a gypsy," agreed Jessup. "I'd like to hear her next recital. How do you like Mrs. Trouver?"

"That uncorseted person? To hear her talk, one would think that profanity had just been discovered, and that it was the crowning feature of social chatter. I can't stand her. She looks like the madam of a fast-house," said Ivan.

Startled by Ivan's phrase, Jessup strove to appear

unconcerned. In a tone that she attempted to keep light and casual, she asked:

"What does the madam of a fast-house look like?"

"Like Mrs. Trouver."

Consumed with an acute curiosity to get answers to questions that had crowded her mind for years, Jessup said in a careless tone:

"Tell me about those resorts. What are they like? Are there many?"

"There used to be. Most cities have abolished their segregated districts."

Jessup's heart was pounding. "What are the women like?" she asked.

"There are all kinds," said Banning shortly.

"Are they at all attractive?"

"Some are."

"I wonder what drives them to that sort of life," mused Jessup aloud. "Viciousness, do you suppose?"

"No, I don't think so. Most of them have been seduced and consider themselves ruined anyway. Many are over-sexed. Some are just after easy money, I suppose."

"*Easy money?*" repeated Jessup guardedly.

Banning yawned. "It is generally supposed to be a lazy and profitable profession, I believe. But it's getting so that you can hardly recognize prostitutes any more. The so-called painted lady has learned how to appear shy and subtle, while the other kind has learned how to paint and flirt. Besides, it has become so common for men to have their mistresses, that a fellow is likely to do his roving without an awful lot of

secrecy. On the other hand, I suppose there are still any number of cautiously conducted resorts where timid rounders can have their brief affairs without too much risk of being observed."

Jessup was silent for a moment. Then yielding to a sudden impulse, she said:

"Do you know, I've sometimes had an uncanny curiosity to see the inside of a place like that. I suppose there is a streak of morbid curiosity in every woman," she made haste to add.

Banning gave her a puzzled look.

"I can't imagine the kind of men who go there."

"You'd be surprised at some of the men you'd find," said Ivan.

"What kind?"

"All kinds. Prominent men. Why, I've seen eminent men in brothels. There's no accounting for the strain of depravity in some of them."

"I can see how men would lead free and easy lives," answered Jessup. "But how a woman could tolerate a different man every night——"

"Oh, that kind doesn't limit herself to just one man in the course of a night," broke in Banning with a brutal effort to terminate a disagreeable conversation.

His contemptuous tone sent a chill through Jessup. But the subject fascinated her. A question kept haunting her. Presently she asked it:

"Do women like that ever have children?"

Banning directed a quick and quizzical look at her.

"I never heard of it happening," he replied.

"Of course they could, couldn't they?" she asked.

"I guess so. But I should think they'd become sterile," said Banning. He reached for a magazine, and began turning the pages.

"I wonder if a woman like that might not encounter a man sooner or later by whom she'd like to have a child," said Jessup in a tone so casual and deceptive that it gave no hint that this question had stormed insistently through her mind for years.

"Yes, I suppose she might," answered Banning absently, reading his magazine. "I'm sure I don't know."

Jessup sat looking at her husband's slender, fastidious face, at his thin lips and placid chin. Only a few feet of space separated him from the knowledge of the unspeakable facts that lay coiled cruelly in her mind. She felt an hysterical impulse to tell him what she knew. She wondered if there was devotion enough in the world to sustain a husband under the crash of such a disclosure. After all, why shouldn't she tell him? He loved her. Why shouldn't he know the facts about her origin? The words floated up in her mind, and were almost on her lips. Then she stopped herself abruptly. In that instant she resolved not to be deceived by her reason. Never would she tell him.

"A woman like that might fall in love, I suppose," she said, in the same discreet tone.

"Yes, it's not inconceivable," conceded Banning.

"I should think she'd be hungry for love," escaped from the questioner.

Ivan read in silence for a moment. "I'm sure I don't know," he said indifferently.

His bored reply sent a peculiar emotional wave through Jessup. She grew hot with an unreasoning resentment at his indifference to the questions that had finally made their escape from the pent-up secret that was torturing her. A strange inner fury lashed at the calmness with which she was looking at him. Her effort to keep control of herself made her tense. The unseen struggle raged for a moment, and then subsided.

"I suppose you've been reading some of this modern realistic truck?" asked Ivan presently without looking up. "They're printing a lot of garbage of late. It's a wonder they permit it."

"Should a thing be forbidden just because it's unpleasant?" demanded Jessup.

"Well, there's no sense in poisoning people's minds," he retorted.

His reluctance to discuss the subject that Jessup had at last touched upon confirmed her impression of a nicety on his part, a scrupulous propriety, that could only be expected to shrink from so ugly a subject. She was aware that this quality, so rare in men, was one of the elements that had drawn her ineluctably to him. That Ivan Banning, product of a sheltered ancestry and squeamish traditions, should have been the one to turn for her the knobs of doors that had been securely closed against her, struck her as an irony. A look of inarticulate pity for him entered her eyes. She would see to it that the dreary truth was kept from him.

As if the pressure of Jessup's mood had impinged upon his nerves, Banning suddenly looked up and

regarded her thoughtful face anxiously. "Are you worried about the escapades I may have had?" he asked uncomfortably.

"No," she replied.

"Is a woman ever entirely impersonal?" he inquired guiltily.

"I was only thinking of the tragedy of that sort of thing to a woman," said Jessup.

"The tragedy? I don't know that it's such a tragedy. Any human relations are likely to be unhappy," replied Ivan. "Marriage isn't necessarily a guaranty of happiness. As for the tragedy of informal relations, it's likely to hit a man just as hard as a woman."

"Do you think so?"

"But I suppose that women will always be regarded as the abused and oppressed sex, and men as the triflers and seducers."

"I can see that that's a mistaken notion," replied Jessup. "It's just as much in some women's temperaments to be lax as in some men's."

"Yes, and in a great many cases," answered Ivan, "it doesn't damn a woman any more than it does a man. I've heard of plenty of men who married women of just that type, and it turned out very happily. Why, there's a city out west whose oldest and best families date back to attachments formed between the miners and the camp-followers during the days of the gold rush. In fact, they've built up a substantial aristocracy."

Jessup felt a thickening in her throat.

"Aristocracy?" she repeated, with a veiled ring of triumph.

"Why not?" asked Ivan.

"I'm surprised to find you so tolerant, that's all," said Jessup casually.

"As a rule, you'll find men a good deal more tolerant about these things than women."

"Then relations like that can't always be entirely sordid," said Jessup in a voice so sharply controlled that it did not betray the poignancy of her emotion.

"Certainly not," answered Ivan, who was again occupied with his reading.

Jessup's questioning stopped abruptly. There was nothing more that she wanted to know. An absorbing satisfaction pervaded her like a shaft of light penetrating an inner dusk, a dusk of long-accumulated doubts and perplexities.

She did not trust herself to remain in the room with her husband. She went to her bedroom and stood tracing aimless designs on the window-pane. The choking sensation in her throat increased. It was as if Ivan's voice had reached into the past with a strangely cleansing effect; and his fragmentary replies to her questions adhered to her mind like golden cobwebs.

CHAPTER XV

THE golden cobwebs that clung to Jessup's mind as a result of Ivan's answers, imparted a sense of reassurance. For the first time since the embittering scene with her grandfather, she felt measurably emancipated from the dragging and repellent sordidness with which she had regarded the circumstances of her origin. Banning's remarks, tossed off lightly, had set at rest some of her blackest misgivings.

The dragging knowledge that had lurked in the depths of her nature, no longer pressed with its old insistence against the surfaces of her consciousness. She was able now to forget it for days at a time. The appeasing fancy that she might have sprung from a finer impulse cheered her spirit.

In one such mood she entered St. Patrick's Cathedral. The solid masonry of the enormous structure, the lofty arches, the solemn hush, empty pews, ornate altars, lighted candles, and elusive figures of priests, recalled the groves and chapel of the convent in which she had spent her girlhood. Forgotten reveries revived and early dreams trailed hauntingly through her mind. The first comforting conceptions of her father and mother floated before her, resurrected from the darkness into which they had been thrust during the scene with her grandparents.

Perhaps the outlines of those early conceptions were more nearly right after all, she reflected, than the harsher ones of her later impressions.

Her mood flooded her with tranquillity; she felt singularly at peace. The city, scarved in a greyish-blue April haze, purred amiably. Jessup's fair, clean skin glowed healthily; there was confidence in her eyes and gait. She felt grateful for having so fine a husband. Doris had proved an excellent friend, and Mrs. Banning had admirable qualities. Jessup recalled the resentful attitude with which she had accompanied Ivan to his mother's a fortnight or so ago. She remembered how deliberately and cunningly she had determined to ingratiate herself with the older woman for the sake of securing unobstructed access to the social levels of the family and of paving the way to eventual possession of Ivan's share of the property. In this mellowed mood, the reasoning that had taken her to Ivan's mother with a great show of penitence seemed unworthy, and she resolved henceforth to feel nothing but genuine good-will. It was like stepping out of an old, scaly skin, and emerging into the glistening air of a new and friendly world.

From this day on, her brushes and pigments flew. Her imagination seemed to shake itself loose. The straining efforts of her apprenticeship seemed suddenly to be over; her invention blossomed; her sense of color expanded; she seemed to have discovered an inner eye that had heretofore been sightless.

When she called soon afterwards at Salant's office with a set of new sketches, the producer spread them

out before him on his desk, and stared at them for several minutes in silence. At length he turned to her and said:

"You're getting better."

"Do you like them?" she asked, gratified.

"You're not as stiff as you were. You've got more freedom into them. There's more sing to your colors." Salant paused. Then he added abruptly: "So you went and got married."

"Yes."

In Salant's eyes was the old frank look of inspection.

"Happy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And I made a damn fool of myself," said the producer.

"In what way?" asked Jessup.

"Not taking you when I could. I had a quixotic notion of making you come to me. Do you remember the day you were in here just before you got married?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Jessup, remembering the impulsiveness with which she had come and later her walk through the mist.

"I couldn't quite make you out that day. You seemed almost ready."

"It would have been a mistake," said Jessup with ingenuous candor. "I couldn't have gone through with it."

"Why not? I'm not so impossible, am I?" asked Salant.

"No."

"You didn't dislike me. You don't dislike me now."

"No. But I couldn't have gone through with it," repeated Jessup.

"You thought it was safer to get married. Was that it? A regular husband has his uses. Everybody knows that. But you'll get tired of him."

"No, I think you're mistaken."

"You've got too much fire in you. You'll get tired of him. And just as soon as you do, I'll know it."

Jessup shook her head.

"I'll know it. And so will you," said Salant in hypnotic tones.

The play closed early in May, and Jessup promised herself that her acting career was over.

Already she was busily occupied with costume designs for a number of productions scheduled to open early in the fall. One of the rooms in her apartment, having excellent north light, she equipped as her studio. She was gradually assembling a library of carefully selected books on costumes, and was grateful for her smattering of German and French which enabled her to add numerous valuable volumes in those languages to her working equipment.

By way of a belated honeymoon, Banning tried to arrange a trip to Europe, but the rush of post-war building activities caused his two partners to urge him to stay in America, both of them having likewise canceled their own vacation bookings. The result was that the Bannings contented themselves with a few weeks on the coast of Maine, which suited Jessup just

as well, since she was eager to concentrate on her work in order to make the best possible showing. It was her custom to begin work at ten in the morning, and to remain at her drawing board until three or four in the afternoon.

Early in the morning she and Ivan often might have been seen together on the bridle-path in Central Park. It was Jessup's first experience as a horsewoman, but she soon developed confidence and became very fond of the sport. Those were memorable and romantic hours. In her early, lonely days in New York, she had occasionally set out on solitary rambles through the park. On these walks the men and women in smart riding-habits, loping past on their horses, had seemed like phantom figures out of a world immeasurably remote from her own. Now she was one of them, and these exhilarating hours more than any other phase of her new life symbolized the changes that had occurred between then and now. There was a persistent romantic tang about the creaking leather beneath her, the feel of her feet against boots and stirrups, the sinewy, nervous power of her horse, the pounding hoof-beats, the smell of the stables, the morning scents of grass and dew and flying earth, the glistening boughs overhead.

"Not too reckless!" protested Ivan once, overtaking her after an unusual burst of speed.

"I love it," she laughed, her cheeks flaming.

"I know you do. But you can't be sure of these hired horses. We've got to get a couple of our own.

You ride as if you were born to it. Your people must have been corking horsemen."

"They were!" she cried, and dug her heels vigorously into her horse's flanks. "Come on!"

Riding with a savage eagerness, it seemed to her at times that if she could only ride fast enough and hard enough she would be able to overtake certain tantalizing and elusive impressions in wild flight just ahead of her. Riding seemed to poise her on the verge of almost grasping dim impressions that went uncannily back beyond the frontiers of her farthest memories.

Sometimes it seemed to her that her father must have galloped over these identical paths.

Frequently they rode in small troops, since numerous acquaintances of Ivan's also rode. Among these was a Herbert Dodge, a member of one of Ivan's clubs, an amiable, frivolous fellow who missed no opportunity to cultivate them on the bridle-path, and there was hardly a morning on which they rode that he did not join them. Whenever Jessup indulged in one of her bursts of speed, it was usually Dodge who was the first to spur his horse alongside.

"Shall we change our riding hour?" asked Ivan one morning when he and Jessup were leaving the stables.

"What for?" she asked.

"I thought perhaps this chap Dodge was too much in evidence."

"Not at all. He seems rather good company."

"It seems impossible to shake him," said Ivan. "I see him at the club now and then, but don't know very much about him. Apparently he has money and more

or less leisure. I believe he does something in real estate. Seems to be rather well connected. Sure he isn't boring you?"

"No. He probably just hates to ride alone," said Jessup sympathetically.

"Well, I sometimes wish he would take it out on someone else," complained Ivan good-naturedly. "But if it doesn't bother you, of course it's quite all right with me."

Soon afterwards, Ivan again referred to Dodge, but this time in a more respectful tone.

"Our friend of the bridle-path had me to lunch to-day," he began. "He has put me in touch with a firm of real estate operators who are likely to prove a valuable connection for us. I'd like to cultivate him. It wouldn't do any harm to have him up for dinner."

"All right," replied Jessup.

"If it's agreeable to you, I'll invite him. His wife is abroad. Shall we ask someone else?"

"Yes, it might be well."

"Who?" asked Ivan.

"Doris?"

"No."

"The gypsy?"

"God forbid."

"Nan Sedley?"

"All right. She's a good sort. I think she and Dodge would like each other. There are so few people in town this summer."

Herbert Dodge proved to be an agreeable dinner guest. He talked engagingly about plays if not about

books, told a story well, and had an apparently inexhaustible fund of narratives concerning the ingenuity of bootleggers. His tall, broad-chested figure was what Nan Sedley called "my kind," but Jessup thought he paid too minute an attention to clothes. He had a ready smile, large languid eyes, with traces of bagginess under them. It seemed his policy to be in a continual good humor. He talked glibly of house-parties on the Hudson and of week-ends on Long Island, with their extravagant gambling and unconcealed love affairs, and gave the impression of being bored with much gadding. He talked familiarly of the motion-picture crowd, seemed to know no end of social and theatrical gossip, and boasted of the star his money was responsible for. He displayed a bored familiarity with the gossip of the financial district, and astonished Banning several times with his accurate knowledge of the facts behind certain movements of stocks.

He was a puzzling type to Jessup. She wondered if he was much of a figure socially or in business, and wondered whether Ivan was overestimating Dodge's ability to do him good turns. But he interested her oddly. He had a restful, companionable effect upon her that was a relief after the nervous, erratic young intellectuals that Doris usually had in tow.

Now and again Jessup got the impression that Dodge's fluent but inconsequential talk represented strategy rather than a shallow mind. She wondered if he was concealing something, and if so, what it was. Occasionally she found him looking at her with an expression that she could not fathom. She could not

determine whether the look that lurked in his brooding, heavy-lidded eyes was one of sex or not.

Miss Sedley was explaining why she was not abroad for the summer. An eminent Italian operatic coach was in New York, she was saying, and she had remained to study under him. Three or four of his pupils were in the Metropolitan Opera Company.

"I've heard of him," said Dodge. "What did he bring with him? A magic carpet of some kind?"

"I hate you," protested Miss Sedley. "Do you think it takes magic to get me into opera?"

"Not at all," laughed Dodge. "I was thinking of his method of developing the voice."

"Oh, he's adorable. It took him just three weeks to clear up every bit of trouble with my middle register."

Dodge turned to Jessup. "I hear you're giving up the stage for costume designing."

"Yes, it's so much more interesting," said Jessup.

"But you have a voice," put in Miss Sedley authoritatively. "You should go on with it."

"No, my singing was only a makeshift," asserted Jessup. "Voice never ran in our family."

"No?" said Dodge. "I should have hazarded the guess that it did. Or is it your family that is musical?" he asked, turning to Ivan.

"Not that I ever heard of," replied the latter.

"My mistake," said Dodge. "I took that for a portrait of Ganton, one of New York's famous early voice teachers," he added, nodding in the direction of the ancestor.

"No, indeed, that's a Jessup," declared Ivan, without observing Jessup's sudden confusion.

"Ah, that explains it," returned Dodge. "I mistook it for Ganton, and assumed that he had been either a member of the family or that someone in the family had been his pupil."

"Ganton?" repeated Banning. "It seems to me that I've heard of Ganton."

"You must have. He was quite a celebrated teacher in his day," declared Dodge. "But really Mrs. Banning should go on with her voice. I quite agree with Miss Sedley."

Grateful for an excuse to show confusion, Jessup said: "You embarrass me. My appearance in musical comedy was more or less of an accident, and it's a great relief to me to be out of it, I can assure you."

"But you were a hit!" insisted Dodge with enthusiasm.

Much to Jessup's relief, when their guests had gone, Banning did not refer to Dodge's comments concerning the portrait. But in speaking of Dodge, she could not resist the impulse to question and discredit him.

"He seems to be a very shallow sort of individual," she said when Ivan mentioned him.

"Then you don't like him?" he asked.

"Oh, he's all right, but not particularly burdened with any mentality. What I can't understand is how a man of that caliber manages to make his way in business."

"By being well and favorably known by a lot of people, and by bringing demand and supply together.

He is probably an excellent salesman," replied Banning.

"He seems like a great big boy," said Jessup. "Except that he has the capacity of a veritable old woman for gossip."

Banning laughed. "You've described him. But he has one thing more—back of his genial superficiality, he doubtless has a shrewd flair for playing politics."

"Politics?"

"Business politics. It is just that type of affable loafer that frequently possesses a perfectly uncanny technique at what we call tunnel-work."

"What is tunnel-work?" inquired Jessup with interest.

"It's the art of patiently digging one's way into a position to accomplish difficult business transactions. There's a disarming easy-going quality about him that makes one like to have him about. He's restful. He doesn't talk shop. He doesn't allow himself to be suspected of knowing too much. I'm more convinced than ever that he is worth cultivating. He's nobody's fool."

"I don't quite know whether I trust him or not," answered Jessup thoughtfully.

"Well, he can't do me any harm, and he may be able to do me some good. I'm going to play along with him for a while, and see what comes of it. If he's in a position to throw any business our way, the firm will make it worth his while. Whether you like him or not, try to be cordial."

One afternoon about the middle of September, when

Banning was in Chicago attending a convention, Dodge telephoned.

"You've become quite a stranger," said Jessup. "Aren't you riding any more?"

"Oh, my horse sprained his knee, and I've been away a good deal, and disgustingly busy. I'm wondering if you and Mr. Banning can't dine with me to-night. I have some news that I think will interest your good husband."

"Mr. Banning is out of town for a few days."

"That's too bad. Then why don't you have dinner with me? Any place you say."

"Unfortunately I already have a dinner appointment."

"Then have tea with me."

"That sounds tempting."

"Let me see. It is now four o'clock. Suppose we meet at the Biltmore at a quarter of five. Right-o?"

Jessup had been at her drawing-board for fully four hours, and was tired. She was in a mood for relaxation, and the prospect of a dance or two with Dodge was not unwelcome. She found the lobby of the popular meeting-place filled with its usual afternoon crowd of men and women, most of them young. Languid youths and pretty girls, many of them merely pretending to have appointments, were strolling to and fro over the thick rugs, trailing interested looks from expectant eyes. The throb of jazz was in the air. On the velvet benches sat scores of waiting women inspecting the passers-by.

Dodge was standing decorously near the desk. He greeted Jessup warmly.

"Charming of you to come," he said. "The only thing I hold against you is that dinner engagement of yours. Still, we shall have an hour or so. It's considerate of Banning to be away."

Jessup paid little heed to his patter.

"You dance as well as you ride," he said as they swung out on the floor together. "I was sure you would. How long is that husband of yours going to be gone?" he asked cozily.

"Oh, for a day or two."

"I hope that convention gets deadlocked and lasts for a month," he declared with playful fervor.

"I thought you had forgotten all about us," she said lightly.

He answered seriously: "I've tried mighty hard to keep you off my mind."

"Sorry to have put you to such an effort."

"It was a struggle. I gave up horseback on account of it."

"Oh, I thought your horse sprained his knee."

"Yes, just in time to bring me to my senses and to keep me from continuing to make a pest of myself."

"But you didn't."

"It's charitable of you to say so," he replied.

The music stopped. He seated Jessup with a flourish, and drew his chair close to hers.

"How is your wife enjoying herself abroad?" asked Jessup.

"First-rate."

"I hope to meet her when she gets back."

"You shall. She's a very attractive woman. But we're not going to talk about her this afternoon. Our time together is too short," declared Dodge decisively.

There was a significant note in his statement. Jessup foresaw that he was going to be sentimental. The look in his large gray eyes beneath their drooping lids was unmistakable.

She remembered that Banning had begged her to be cordial.

"At last we have a chance to talk about ourselves," he said, the former note of playfulness no longer in his voice.

"There have been plenty of chances for that," was Jessup's matter-of-fact reply.

"No, there haven't. We've never been alone. So I didn't make a nuisance of myself in the park? I'll bet Banning thought so."

"Not in the least."

"You were the most romantic-looking creature I ever saw in a saddle."

"It must have been your own romantic mood that made you think so."

"Every time I see you I'm plunged into a romantic mood."

"What a confession for a staid and stodgy business man to make!" railed Jessup.

"I don't know that I'm so staid and stodgy. Do I strike you that way? Does one have to be a kid of twenty to fall in love?"

"You're not in love," said Jessup derisively.

"Oh, I'm not? Then how would you describe it?"

"You're just in need of amusement. And doubtless it entertains you to deliver an outburst of this kind to a woman who has been married for only six months."

"Don't remind me that you're married," begged Dodge. "But even if you are, it makes no difference to me."

"I suppose it only makes you feel safer to be reckless," was Jessup's amused reply.

"What's reckless about it?" asked Dodge petulantly. "I tell you I'm indifferent to anything and everything but you."

"What flattering intensity," said Jessup, imitating his tone.

"I don't imagine that Ivan Banning's intensity would start much of a blaze," replied the other. "He doesn't know how to love you."

"Oh, dear, no! You're the only man in New York who knows how to love a woman!" chaffed Jessup.

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself. But you'll find out that you can't laugh me out of the way. I never knew anyone who affected me the way you do."

"I'm afraid you're very delicately constituted. Do you see that girl over there in asparagus green?"

"Which one?"

"The one with the elderly man who keeps pulling so nervously at his mustache. She's been trying to flirt with you ever since we came in. Why don't you smile at her and save the day for her?"

"She makes me sick."

"She seems just your kind. There's something wild

and barbaric about her. Look at those earrings. All she needs is a ring in her nose. I know she'd appreciate an ardor like yours. You should at least exchange telephone numbers with her."

"What the devil would I want with her telephone number? I can't see her at all. Do I look as if I'd be interested in every woman?"

"You look like an affable middle-aged business man devoted to his family, although it is in Europe. I should never have suspected how sentimental you are. Does tea always excite you?"

"Do you call forty-two middle-aged?" inquired Dodge testily.

The music began, and again they moved out among the dancers. While Jessup had derived considerable enjoyment from her companion's unexpected outburst, she regretted on Ivan's account that he had shown these symptoms.

"My heart bleeds for that girl in green," remarked Jessup as they swung past her.

"The hell with the girl in green," growled Dodge.

"But it is such a pity that all this you are telling me should be wasted on one so unresponsive," lamented Jessup.

"You wait," answered Dodge fervidly.

"You interest me," said Jessup when they were seated again. "What if I were an irresponsible young thing, and if my head were easily turned, and if I did respond? And if, when your wife came back and my husband came back, they found everything in a mess? Then what?"

"Things would have to take their own course," replied Dodge.

"That's all very vague. Do you mean the usual domestic smash-up?"

"I don't know that it would necessarily have to come to that. When someone's foot happens to slip, it doesn't mean that all concerned immediately have to rush into court about it, does it?" asked Dodge, unperturbed.

"Do you consider that Mr. Banning would be disposed to stand calmly by in case my foot, as you call it, slipped?" asked Jessup.

"I don't see how he can expect you to devote yourself exclusively to him for all time. The other is bound to happen some time. Is it good sense to wait until you're forty or fifty?"

"What about Mrs. Dodge?" asked Jessup with an irresistible curiosity concerning this man's code of conduct. "Do you permit her all that freedom?"

"Could I stop it?"

"What I mean is, do you allow her to have her affairs?"

"I don't know what she does. I don't spy on her."

"You mean you don't care what she does."

"That's her own business, not mine."

"But surely she doesn't suspect you of being as impressionable as you are?"

"She's never had occasion to raise the question."

"You can't care very much for her."

"I admire her very much. As for being desperately in love with her, no, of course I'm not."

"And you assume that Mr. Banning will also reach that stage!"

"I don't know that he will. You're different. You will hold him a good deal longer than he'll ever hold you. You're too adorable for a man to lose interest in you."

"After what you've just told me, how do I know that he isn't having his affairs right now? How do I even know that he went to Chicago?"

"He went to Chicago all right. I can vouch for that. He wired me from there this afternoon."

Jessup gave him a look of surprise.

"So you knew he was out of town when you telephoned?" she demanded.

"Certainly I knew it. That's why I telephoned," said Dodge

CHAPTER XVI

"You never can tell what a casual bridle-path acquaintance is going to develop into," declared Banning soon after his return from Chicago.

Jessup waited uncomfortably for him to continue; she wondered whether he had any knowledge of Herbert Dodge's attentions to her.

"Remember the way Dodge used to bob up almost every time we went for a ride?" Banning continued.

"Yes, you thought he was an awful bore."

"I was afraid he was boring you. However, he has proved himself anything but that."

Again Jessup waited. She was by no means able to determine what her husband was getting at.

"I exchanged a number of wires with him while I was away," he added.

"You did?" asked Jessup, showing less interest than she felt.

"About our conspiracy to induce the Hauser Realty Company to change architects."

"Oh, yes. Anything new on that?"

"It begins to look promising. The Hauser concern has decided not to retain its former architects on its proposed Park Avenue apartment houses. Dodge wired me to that effect. There's an item here in *The*

American Architect confirming what he said. I think we're going to get the contract. If it goes through it will be due to nice work on Dodge's part."

"What was his object?"

"For one thing, we'll make it worth his while, of course, for having brought us in touch with the Hausers. They're very large operators, and do a whale of a lot of building."

"You mean you will pay Mr. Dodge a commission?"

"Exactly."

"Wouldn't other architects pay him if he did the same for them?"

"Naturally," said Banning. "On the other hand," he added, stroking his chin complacently, "he is very strongly sold on our firm, and is convinced that we can render a far better service than most competing houses. Then, too, there's the element of friendship."

"Yes, I've noticed that you and Mr. Dodge seem to have grown quite fond of each other."

"I like him very much."

"Do you think he's trustworthy?" asked Jessup.

"I can't see any reason to think otherwise. It seems to me you mentioned something like that once before," said Banning questioningly.

"Did I?"

"Yes, the first time he was here. Right after he had gone you expressed some sort of doubt about him. What makes you wonder?"

"For all his big talk, he seems to be a sort of social nobody, doesn't he?"

"Oh, he has the salesman's temperament. They all do a lot of talking."

"His wife gets back soon, doesn't she?"

"Yes, I believe so. We must have them up and meet her."

"I should like to. By the way, I meant to tell you that Mr. Dodge called up while you were away and asked us to dinner," said Jessup.

"I hope you went. I don't want you to make a recluse of yourself when I'm compelled to be out of town."

"I couldn't go to dinner. But I went to tea with him."

"Fine. Where did you go?"

"Biltmore. We had a couple of dances."

"I'm glad you're hitting it off so well together."

"I don't know that we're hitting it off so well together," returned Jessup indifferently. "I remembered that you wanted me to be cordial, that's all."

"Well, it won't do any harm. You'll find that business isn't conducted entirely in the office, and that the right sort of friendly relations on the part of a man's wife are a fine thing."

Jessup smiled disparagingly. "I shouldn't like to feel that your progress in business depended upon my ability to keep a string of men in a good humor. That's hardly my idea of keeping myself occupied."

"That isn't what I mean, Diana. I know you're extremely busy with your drawing, and that a lot of my business associates may be socially impossible. What I mean to say is that when it isn't inconvenient or dis-

tasteful for you to be nice to some of these men, your influence may often provide just the extra weight necessary to shove an important deal through. You have an unusual personality. And having been on the stage makes you just that much more of a personage. All of which helps."

Jessup smiled at the gullibility of men. It was apparent to her that Ivan knew nothing of Dodge's spectacular display of interest in her. She was accustomed to the fantastic freedom among theatrical men in these matters. One expected it on Broadway. But she had somehow grown accustomed to thinking of business as a world apart, and of its men as being differently constituted. She had regarded Salant as somewhere above men's average level of conduct in theatrical circles, and Ivan as somewhere above the average level in business circles, but had assumed that these two were fair exemplars of the codes of their respective classes. It had never occurred to her that the freedom of theatrical life might have its counterpart in business life. She knew in a vague way that there was throat-slashing competition among business men, that battles raged over the heads of rich women, and that even in families of high standing, wives sometimes became entangled with other women's husbands, and husbands with other men's wives, as a result of which there were scandals, separations, divorces, and occasional shootings. But she thought of these as the exceptions, not the rule—as the dissonances among the prevailing harmonies of an established respect for one another's rights and possessions. In short, she had seen the business world

through a kind of glamour; she had realized its codes and traditions; and she had accepted Ivan's associates on these terms.

Her experience with Dodge had left her disturbed and doubtful. Her first reaction to his overtures had been a surprised amusement. His frank admission that he was taking advantage of Banning's absence to give rein to his sentimentality had confirmed her earlier impressions that he was essentially superficial and moreover that he could not be trusted. That Dodge was flighty, was of no moment; but that he was deceptive was a matter of concern to Jessup; it made her realize that Ivan should be warned against possible treachery at the hands of Dodge in their business relations.

During the autumn they saw Dodge at dinners from time to time. In Ivan's presence he invariably affected the same bland, casual ennui; but whenever he found himself alone with Jessup, if even for only a moment, the indifferent eyes would smolder beneath their heavy lids, and he would lose no time in addressing whispered phrases to her. But the moment Banning returned, Dodge would revert to his former manner of apparent indifference.

Once, unable to keep quiet any longer, yet uncertain as to how to proceed, Jessup made an impulsive effort to put Ivan on guard against Dodge.

"I keep worrying about your dealings with Dodge," she began.

Ivan laughed. "You may be sure that there isn't a thing to worry about," he answered promptly. "What are you disturbed about?"

"I don't know. But I don't seem to trust him."

"You haven't seen him cheat at bridge, have you?" asked Ivan banteringly.

"No, but he would doubtless be too shrewd for anything so obvious as that," replied Jessup, nettled at the question.

"Then what is it? Just intuition?"

"Perhaps," said Jessup evasively.

"Do people gossip about him? If you know anything choice, tell me," returned Ivan.

"No, I don't believe I know any gossip, either choice or banal. Still, he is undoubtedly a roué."

"What makes you think so?"

"He has a sensual expression in his eyes."

"It's quite possible that he likes women. A good many men do. There's nothing so unusual about that, is there?"

"His weakness for women isn't of the slightest interest to me. He can have a harem if he likes. But I should hate to see him mislead you in business matters."

"Not a chance," smiled Ivan.

"I don't think he can be a particle of use to you. You're only wasting your time."

"I don't think I am," was the complacent reply.

"You'll find that he's deceitful. I wouldn't trust him too far myself."

"Why wouldn't you? Has he done anything or said anything that leads you to distrust him?"

"Oh, he's just a big bluff. I'm sure of it," said Jessup, unwilling to say more.

Ivan looked at her contentedly and replied: "I'm going to tell you something."

"Nothing that you could tell me about him would surprise me," answered Jessup, impatient at Ivan's comfortable tone.

"This will. We signed a large and favorable contract to-day with the Hauser people. We could never have done it in the world without him. I was just on the point of telling you when you started in. This contract is something that we can be mighty grateful for. It is bound to open the door to a number of other accounts that any architect would be glad to get."

"I'm very glad I was mistaken," answered Jessup.

"For once your hunch was all wrong, dear."

But Jessup, far from being reassured, was aware of a heightened uneasiness. Having felt a deep conviction that Dodge's representations in the Hauser matter were only a pretense designed to give his relations with Ivan and herself the air of an authentic friendship, the discovery of her mistake, instead of reassuring her, now tinged her with even deeper misgivings. She seemed aware of a sneaking motive in Dodge's tactics. Several times during the past week he had telephoned, making petulant requests that she join him at tea. Only this afternoon he had telephoned again, urging her to let him call, repeating the old phrases.

Could it be, she wondered, that Dodge had sought this means of ingratiating himself with Ivan against possible discovery of his pursuit of herself? Could Dodge's thoughts have taken so puerile a course? Or,

she wondered, having done her husband a valuable turn, by which she herself would profit, did Dodge assume that she would submit to his attentions and yield to a surreptitious liaison?

The more she debated the question, the more she was inclined to credit these suppositions. It disgusted her to suspect that she had actually figured in so sordid a line of reasoning. It made her question the attitude that the men of Ivan's acquaintance must be holding toward her. She wondered what men saw in her to start the crude machinery of such reasoning. Did they sense something inherently inferior about her? Would such grotesque fancies ever present themselves in connection with the wives of other men of the group? It was inconceivable to her that Mrs. Murray or Mrs. Cooper, the wives of Ivan's partners, could possibly figure in such reasoning on the part of Dodge or anyone else.

A dark suspicion crossed the path of her thoughts and swept her like a storm-cloud. Had her origin left its mark upon her? Were men drawn to her by some subtle atmospheric taint foreign to other women? Did they receive telepathic, involuntary intimations concerning the red twilight from which she had issued?

Her questionings gave way to a sudden loathing, to a silent inarticulate fury in which her spirit raged. She hated life and the lust by which it was hurled on its course.

From the courtyard below came an abrupt wail of a cat, a continuous yowling broken only by brief pauses.

It pierced the smoky twilight in excruciating cries. Presently it ceased and to Jessup's sensitive ears came the faintest meow.

Jessup crossed to the window, listening to the alternating cries of anguish of the unseen cat giving birth to her kittens. She could picture her, alone in her torture, while the paternal tom-cat, indifferent to what was happening, and inflamed with a new desire, was doubtless chasing another mate along back fences. There was a final, air-splitting shriek, and the last of the litter must have been delivered, for now the listener could hear a moaning purr mingling with the fragile sounds from new throats.

As she listened, Jessup's fury had passed, giving way to pity for the stray animal in the darkness below, torn by the mysterious pain of giving birth to her young. It was the most vivid impression she had ever had of the process of birth, and it filled her with a singular sense of awe.

She went to the telephone, vaguely conscious that the bell was ringing. Dodge was calling. He was downstairs in the lobby. He begged permission to run up for a few minutes. Jessup told him to come.

A look of cool and sardonic amusement was in Jessup's eyes when he entered.

"I simply had to have a glimpse of you," began Dodge with his customary fervor.

"My nerves are in a frazzle and I must look like a wreck," said Jessup wearily.

"You show no signs of it. But if that's the way

you feel, then I'm just in time to cheer you up." Dodge laid aside his hat, stick, gloves, and coat, without waiting for an invitation to do so.

"I don't want to be cheered up," replied Jessup indifferently.

"You *are* in a bad humor." Dodge started toward her.

"I feel vicious. Keep away," she returned, waving him back.

"What's up?"

In measured and impatient tones, Jessup asked: "How often do I have to tell you not to run in here when I'm alone?"

"How was I to know that you were alone? How did I know that Banning wasn't here?"

"My husband is never here this time of the day. He works."

"Yes, I understand that he is rather busy just now, having added the Hausers to his list of clients," returned Dodge affably.

But Jessup chose to ignore the significance of his dig. She replied: "You manage to keep yourself well-informed as to his affairs."

"I was glad to have been able to throw a piece of business his way," said Dodge.

Jessup studied her guest curiously for a moment. "Just what was your object in doing so?" she asked.

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"Yes, I should like very much to know."

"All right. I did it because I thought *you* would

appreciate it. Banning isn't anything to me, you know."

Jessup frowned. "Oh, so that's it?"

"Yes, that's what it amounts to, since you ask," said Dodge with entire assurance.

"Do you think that's fair?" asked Jessup with renewed curiosity to fathom the mental processes of the other.

"Why isn't it? He gets business that he couldn't have touched with a ten-foot pole before I stepped in and showed him how."

"I hardly think he is so badly in need of business as all that," replied Jessup, restraining the fury that was welling up in her.

Dodge, gazing at her, misinterpreted the glistening look in her eyes. "You *do* care for me a little, don't you?" he asked.

"No, I don't. Why in heaven's name should I love you?"

"You are absolutely arctic. You're full of the devil to-day. The more you resist, the more determined I am to have you."

"Such a hero," scoffed Jessup.

"I would have found you no matter where you were," continued Dodge with increasing fervor. "Nothing could have kept me away from you. If necessary, I would have followed you through the streets."

"Yes, I can see how you would. I dare say you follow a good many women through the streets," said Jessup.

Dodge's freshly-massaged face flushed. "I'm sorry you have so low an opinion of me. I have told you again and again that I never look twice at any other women. Can't you believe me?"

"Certainly you can't expect me to."

"Why is it that you won't believe anything I say?" demanded Dodge fretfully. "Believe anything else that you like, but please believe in my sincerity toward you."

"It's impossible."

"Why should it be impossible?"

"Because I'm not that stupid, and because you've played too mean a trick on Ivan."

"If Banning can't hold you, that's his lookout, not mine," was the imperturbable reply. "I don't consider that I'm damaging him. I don't see it that way at all. Sooner or later you're sure to lose interest in him. It's inevitable. Women don't stick to one man forever these days."

A sudden sternness entered Jessup's eyes. "I'd like to ask you something," she said. "I'd like to know what there is about me that makes you presume to adopt this attitude?"

"Your irresistible fascination."

"Humph. There are plenty of women in New York whom you might find irresistibly fascinating, but to whom you wouldn't dare talk in these terms," continued Jessup. "I confess that you have roused my curiosity. I want to know just what it is that gave you the impression that you could walk calmly in here and

make love to me. Do you consider me on so low a level?"

"No, I consider you on a very high level. You have talent; you have genius."

Jessup answered in contempt: "What do you know about talent? Or about genius?"

Ignoring her tone, Dodge replied: "You have an intellect. You are stimulating. You're so far above the idle chatter of other women that there's no comparison."

"What do you know about intellect? Your mind is constantly on fool sentiments and sex," said Jessup scornfully.

As she looked at the soft, pampered face of her visitor, a sudden impatience at the waste of time in talking to him rolled through her. She felt physically and mentally sick of his bleating talk. She had often studied him, wondering what he reminded her of. She knew now, he looked like a sheep. The readiness of this social nobody to step in and if possible to wreck the whole structure of the social background she had laboriously fashioned at last into solidity, flooded her with resentment. What if she had been moved by his flattery, and if in a careless and unguarded moment she had amused herself with this persistent wooer? She was grateful that he had always disgusted her. In order to terminate the fruitless dialogue, Jessup rose and yawned.

But the sight of her yawn seemed to ignite her visitor into a sudden passion for mastery. Instantly he was on his feet. With the litheness of an animal he

made a glide toward her, and surrounded her with bearlike arms.

With a furious movement Jessup averted her face, and drove her pointed fingers into his arms in a spirited effort to break his hold.

"God, you're strong!" he panted, fighting her.

"Look out! You're tearing my dress!" she exclaimed.

"Then quit fighting me. I've got to have you," he said heavily. "Give in to me! Give in to me!"

She caught his eye on the tip of a look of derision, and kept it fixed upon him until by degrees his grasp relaxed.

"Why don't you care for me?" he complained. "Here I am, head over heels in love with you, and you do nothing but resist me. Why, most women would jump at the chance. I'm not a nobody, you know. I belong to one of the old families. I was considered at one time one of the best-dressed men in New York City. I belong to the Union League Club, the University, the Yacht Club, and the Society of the Cincinnati."

"And where do you bank?" asked Jessup.

"Why the bank?"

"Just to make your credit references complete."

Jessup was seated on the couch, and suddenly Dodge dropped on his knees before her.

"Oh, such homage!" she exclaimed. "On your knees?"

"Yes, and you're the first woman I ever got down on

my knees to. I never did this before in my life. You've got to take me seriously. What else can I do to convince you that I care for you? Can't you see? How can I prove it?"

"Why, just bray like an ass and make the picture complete," said Jessup. "I'm sorry. That was unkind. I didn't mean to hurt you. You know, after all, men like you aren't so bad; and if women aren't fooled by your ardor, you really serve a good purpose. It's a game with you, just as it's a game with us. It's all very well to have the fun of it. If she doesn't weaken, it's a great sport. But the trouble with men of your kind is that you're apt to be convincing—and if that happens there's nothing left for her to do but shoot herself or turn on the gas, and as I don't care to exit just yet, I'll fix my hair and call it a bully afternoon."

"I could make you love me——" began Dodge.

"Ha, love you?" laughed Jessup. "That's the last thing in the world I want to do. That's not my idea of peace."

Dodge gave her a reproachful look.

"Are you trying to make a fool of me?" he demanded.

"No, but I'm afraid you're rapidly making one of yourself. And really, I'm very tired."

When the door closed behind Herbert Dodge, it was not the hurt, malicious quality of his parting expression that lingered in Jessup's mind, but regret that she had to humiliate him so severely. She fancied, however,

that the ludicrous pantomime of Dodge on his knees had fully served the purpose of ridding herself of him.

Aware of the nervous energy she had expended in coping with him, she went to her studio and sank into a chair. Dreamily she surrendered herself to reveries, and to a happy contemplation of the labors in which she was engaged and of the tranquil security of her life with Ivan. How considerate he was, she mused, compared with Salant and Dodge and others that moved past her in a hazy procession. Rare good fortune had attended her in her gamble with marriage. Her occasional misgivings concerning Ivan had, after all, been unwarranted. He was undeniably devoted to her, and was precisely the type she had dreamed of marrying, while scarcely hoping to be able to. A sense of warmth and peacefulness crept over her like the spell of a soothing drug.

She sat waiting for him in the subdued lamplight with a strange and eager expectancy.

CHAPTER XVII

AN impressive hush brooded as usual over the executive offices of the firm of Murray, Cooper & Banning. It was on an afternoon in December, and Jessup, while on an errand in the neighborhood of the Architects' Building on Park Avenue, having discovered that she had mislaid her key to their apartment, had run in to get Ivan's. Banning was engaged in a long-distance telephone conversation when she arrived, and she was asked to wait for him in the conference room. He was talking to someone in St. Louis.

Her first impressions of the firm's offices had remained in Jessup's mind, and to-day she was aware of the same artistic distinction that she had felt more than a year ago when Ivan had first shown her the establishment. The somber tint of the plastered walls, the deep blue rug, the solid Jacobean table and chairs and cabinets seemed to belong to a remote and important world and to connote secrets of beauty incomparably above the tinsel of the theater and the evanescence of its trappings. There was a solemn air here that invoked visions of lofty spires and domes, of arches and monoliths, of the heroic Alexandrian swing of bridges and the frozen beauty of terraces and broad stairs. A strengthening sense of security and faith surrounded and pervaded her every time she stood in this room.

There was an austerity about it that had something of the undying qualities of Greece and Rome and the Italy of the Renaissance. That a tawdry individual like Herbert Dodge could possibly figure in the transactions of this office seemed grotesque and ridiculous to her.

Creamy, fascinating prints of sketches for museums, libraries, post offices, churches, and apartment houses hung in frames on the walls. There was a sketch in color of the forecourt of one of Murray's city plans. There were white plaster models of several of the firm's projects. On the table were thick copies of various periodicals—*Architecture*, *The Architectural Forum*, *The Architectural Record*, and *The American Architect*.

Jessup stood at the window, more than a dozen stories up, and gazed at the thicket of slender buildings, some of which rose with the eagerness of rockets from the earth, and down at the narrow streams of motors on the streets. She was proud of Ivan. She could scarcely realize that her destinies and his were bound together. Her thoughts went back through the years to the house of the Helmans, to her bedroom under the rafters, to the disclosure on the final night of her life there, and it seemed to her now like the faintest of echoes from a previous existence, wrapped in unreality.

The door of the conference room opened, and Ivan came toward her.

"You won't mind if I don't linger, will you?" he asked abruptly. "I'm in a bad jam to-day. There's a hospital commission from Michigan due here in ten

minutes. Murray wants me to sit in. I may be tied up for dinner. I'll telephone you if I am. Here's your key."

Banning's nervous, preoccupied manner was disturbing to Jessup. "I'm sorry to have interrupted. I can't imagine what happened to my key," she explained.

"It's perfectly all right," he said with the same abruptness.

"I've been doing a little Christmas shopping," she added.

"Good."

There was an unnatural indifference in his terse response. She said: "Please don't overwork. You look tired out."

"I'm all right. Don't bother about me," he answered.

He went to the elevator with her and bowed gravely as she entered the cage and was plunged out of sight.

With suave authority, Daniel J. Murray, senior member of the firm, received the delegation from Michigan, introduced his associates, and began the presentation of his plans for the hospital. Murray had an air of eminence; he moved with lambent ease among his sketches, prints, and other exhibits; his phrasing was mobile. Knowing the limitations of his clients, he showed them beautiful and impressive sketches and meticulous models instead of engineering blue-prints. He had schooled himself in the art of driving a glowing impression of the finished structure into the minds of laymen, most of whom, as he put it,

"didn't know a column from a sewer pipe." He could talk to them of classical beauty in terms that were familiar to them, and could convey to them a sense of the splendor of its chaste lines and singing curves. It was as though he took their stiff, unused imaginations into his restless hands and kneaded them into a consistency that he could work with.

"You see, gentlemen," he was saying with rapid enthusiasm in a voice characterized by a genteel, sonorous gruffness, "what I've done here is to capitalize a natural setting of trees and hillside instead of trying to kill it. I am showing you not only how to present a beautiful hospital to your community, but how to utilize and glorify a section of your town that is now a neglected dump-heap. Instead of offering you a structure that will stick out like a sore thumb, I am proposing a group correctly keyed to harmonize with those fine old oaks and those hills of yours. In other words, instead of trying to show you what a smart fellow I am, and plastering the place with Coney Island stuff, I've taken my cue from God Almighty. A hundred years from now those hills are still going to be right there, and the hospital group as I'm showing it to you here, massed low like this, and this, and this, against the base of the hill, will never be out of harmony. You won't have to tear it down in forty or fifty years because it doesn't match the kind of a city you will have by that time, or because you need something bigger. All you'll have to do is to add other buildings to your group, all tied together by my central plaza and formal parking."

With his little finger, the architect was indicating different parts of his sketches, the middle-westerners following his rhythmic movements with fascinated attention.

"You see," broke in the practical B. F. Cooper, "instead of simply building you a hospital, we're making that junk-pile out there the finest darn spot in the city. It's no good now for anything but tenements and shanties, but as soon as this news leaks out, they'll be bidding on all that property and they'll start putting up real homes where they'll have something to look at."

"Exactly," resumed Murray. "Architecture," he generalized, "no longer concerns itself with the problem of a single detached building but with its potential effect upon the whole community. I won't live to see the completion of the plan in all its details. Neither will any of us here. But what we're working toward is a plan that will meet the requirements of generations to come, instead of slapping something up in a hurry for just the needs of the immediate future."

Ivan Banning was a silent listener to the recital of his colleagues. His brooding thoughts were remote from Michigan and remote from this conference. His attentive manner gave no hint of the gloom that filled him. When the consultation broke up and he pleasantly bade the firm's clients good-by, it was an effort for him to smile.

Left alone in the conference room, he stood staring out over the darkened city. He thrust his hands dejectedly into his pockets. His shoulders sagged under

an agonizing load. In a murky daze his thoughts revolved round a fixed idea. . . . He recalled that Jessup had been in this room with him an hour or two ago. It seemed that she was locked out of the apartment and she had come to get his key. The memory of it sent a bitter smile flickering to his lips.

Murray came briskly in.

"Well, Banning, it looks as if we had persuaded our friends to go ahead," he began, stroking the short, pointed beard that made a vertical path down his solid chin.

"It looks that way," murmured Banning, striving to display some interest.

"You and I may have to go to Michigan for a few days," continued Murray.

"It would be a relief to go anywhere!"

Caught by the depression of Banning's tone, the other demanded: "What's wrong, old man?"

"Do you remember that personal matter I asked your advice about several weeks ago?" asked Banning.

"I do. I believe I suggested that you investigate the unfortunate rumors."

"Well," said Banning with an effort, "I had them investigated. My wife had spoken of Helman, her grandfather. So I sent a man out there to interview him."

"What did you find?" asked Murray more gently.

"It's worse than I suspected. It's hideous," said Banning pitifully.

He fumbled among the papers in his pocket, produced a special-delivery and registered letter from a

law firm in St. Louis, and handed it to Murray, saying: "It came this afternoon."

Murray stroked his stubby beard as he read the letter. His face grew grave. "H'm," he muttered once. "Christ!" he exclaimed a moment later. "It doesn't seem possible."

Banning turned bitterly away. He began twisting at a button on his coat with fingers that were icily cold.

"It's altogether possible, of course," said Murray, "that there is some mistake about all this. I don't question the reliability of your investigators, but there is plenty of room for doubt, I should say, as to the correctness of the memory, as well as the actual veracity of these people who have been interviewed. I shouldn't accept such allegations as this as final, by any means. There is ample room for reasonable doubt. Surely there must be documents of some sort in your wife's possession on which she bases her understanding of who her people were."

"I don't know," answered Banning desolately.

"Why don't you sound her out?"

"I hate to."

"Very guardedly I mean," said Murray earnestly. "Something may be brought to light that will clear everything up. Certainly it would be interesting to know how your wife happened to get hold of the portrait that she evidently believes to be that of an ancestor of hers."

Again the distinguished architect adjusted his eyeglasses and read the letter that he still held in his

hand. From time to time he would read a phrase or a sentence aloud.

"H'm," he said once. "No trace of the Jessups she speaks of. Or of any connection with operations in grain down there in that section." The architect paused. Then he muttered reflectively: "The statement of the physician. . . . Birth records. . . . Let me see. That's twenty-six years ago, isn't it? How old is your wife?"

"Twenty-six," said Banning miserably.

"Even so, there's nothing conclusive about all this," continued Murray, endeavoring to appear cheerful. Again he scrutinized the letter, and read: "'Taken to the home of its grandparents in the state of New York by another inmate of the same resort.'"

Banning groaned, and reached for the correspondence. His face was gray.

"Well, I wouldn't jump at conclusions," said Murray with a singular gentleness in his gruff voice. "Don't do anything in a hurry. Come to dinner with me at the club."

Left alone for a moment, Banning looked drearily at the conference room and its paraphernalia of architecture. But so deadened was his brain that he was unconscious of the irony that here in this atmosphere of building, the gleaming structure of his faith had come down with a crash upon his head.

He remembered Jessup running in for the key, radiant in her furs, having just started her Christmas shopping. Locked out of their apartment, she had come to him unsuspectingly for the key.

"Oh, God damn," he shuddered. "Oh, God damn!"

"Don't do anything in a hurry, my boy," warned Murray when they were leaving the club. "Plenty of time for action after you make sure—if you make sure," he added with emphasis. "You care a good deal for her, do you?"

"Yes. I only wish I didn't."

"That's the hell of it," said Murray. "Whatever the facts turn out to be, we can't have any publicity. No publicity, Banning. If it has to come to annulment proceedings, they've got to be kept out of the newspapers. That can be managed. I only hope it won't come to that." They were in front of Murray's car. "Where can I drop you?" he asked.

"I think I'll take a walk," said Banning.

"An excellent tonic," said the older man, slapping Banning on the back. "Good night."

"Good night."

Banning set out through the dry, wintry street. His brain was gripped by a numbness that permitted thoughts only to straggle slowly on their course, and his tired thoughts were repeating themselves as they revolved in a vicious circle. It began with Herbert Dodge's casual remark months ago on the similarity of appearance between Jessup's ancestor and Ganton, the voice teacher; and it ended with to-day's blasting letter from his lawyers in St. Louis. He recalled that it was a friend of Nan Sedley's who had actually identified the portrait as that of Ganton, and that it was Dodge who had for some reason communicated the

information to the elder Mrs. Banning. Ivan's mind was confused as to exactly what had been said. The suspicions of his mother had been aroused, however, and she had caused inquiries regarding the Jessups to be made in St. Louis, with the result that some of her suspicions had been confirmed and some new ones invoked. Banning had confided in Murray, and Murray had urged that the facts be carefully sifted.

And now, with the results of the investigation bristling in his path, Ivan Banning strode through the streets trying vainly to get hold of his thoughts and to drive them in straight lines. Murray's hopeful repetition of his belief that the evidence in hand might not be conclusive afforded Banning no comfort. A sinister conviction that the reports concerning his wife were true had sunk heavily into his consciousness and imbedded itself too deeply to be dislodged.

Already, in the sickening light of this evidence, he could understand different things that had hitherto mystified him, and was suddenly able to perceive significance in episodes that had seemed trivial to him at the time they occurred. He began to understand why Jessup had gone simply by the name of "Miss Jessup" at the time he had met her and why she had declined to use the name "Helman," her mother's family name. He recalled that she had never spoken of her family until practically forced to do so under direct examination by his mother. He remembered the persistence with which she had questioned him one night soon after their marriage concerning houses of ill-fame, the kind of women identified with these resorts, and the kind

of men who frequented them. With a sinking heart he recalled her question as to whether women of that kind ever had children. He had attached no importance to her casual inquiries at the time; he had attributed them to idle feminine curiosity; it had not occurred to him to look for a subtler motive.

As these memories went scraping and grating through his mind, Banning knew that he could not bear silence on the subject between Jessup and himself any longer. If there was any mistake about his suspicions, he felt that he had to know it. If they were based upon fact, he had to know that. He felt like a dog for pursuing this foul evidence in secret. He wished to God that he had gone at once to Jessup with the information that the portrait was of Ganton, and not of Amos Jessup. It was hideous, this work of a surreptitious and slinking pick-and-shovel crew behind her back. He blamed Dodge, he blamed Nan Sedley, he blamed his mother, he blamed Murray, and he blamed himself for this whispering, this ghastly gossip.

A wave of tenderness for Jessup started through him with a rush. An infinite pity mingled with a savage impulse to protect her. The conspiracy into which he had been drawn to tear facts out of their hiding-places suddenly seemed frightful and intolerable. An excruciating wish that he had kept out of it slashed him. The numbness of his brain gave way to a poignant regret, and a sense of indescribable remorse took possession of him.

He sprang into a taxi, and gave the driver his address. His previous doubt as to what to do or where

to go all left him, as he realized only now that he had actually been stalking in the direction opposite to that of his home. He was swept with anxiety as to whether Jessup had remained at home this evening. He felt in desperate need of her, as if by crushing her in his arms and shielding her he could make amends for the evil he had done her.

"Hurry up!" he yelled at the driver. He could hardly restrain himself from leaping into the front seat, thrusting the other aside, seizing the wheel, and jamming the throttle to the floor-board.

He thought of his early walks with Jessup through bright autumnal streets, his first dance with her, the delicious waiting for her at the stage-door, the pungent pools of orange-colored light on the sidewalk reflected from the lights of the Rialto.

He realized now that nothing could make him betray her. He no longer cared who she was, or what she was, or where she had come from. "In heaven's name, what difference does it make anyway!" he exclaimed aloud. He no longer cared if the whole world turned against her; he would stand by her. With a pang he remembered his coolness toward her at the office that afternoon. He remembered her hurt and anxious look as she went away, and that look of hers had haunted him ever since. He swore that he would never treat her that way again.

He reflected that he must have been demented to allow the investigation to be made that had brought the despicable back-wash of to-day's paralyzing letter. What had possessed him to show that letter to Mur-

ray? Why had he not torn it up and kept the facts sealed in his own mind where they could go no further? He had already done Diana an irreparable injustice by planting the seeds of this knowledge in the minds of others. How could he correct it and how could he make amends?

In his frantic mood of self-reproach he kept repeating to himself that Diana's origin concerned nobody but herself. All that concerned him or anybody else was what she had made of herself. The soil from which she had sprung was none of his business. Besides, who was he to pick and dig at the roots of her life and unearth these facts and hold them against her? He thought of himself as a rooting swine.

Could he conceal his traitorous act, could he hide it from her, or would it betray him in spite of himself? Would it taint his voice and his manner, would it show in his eyes, would the loathing of himself not be apparent to her the instant she saw him again? A dread of having to face her crept through his nerves and made him chill.

Was he enough of an actor to secrete the knowledge of what he had done, and to save her from finding it out? He strove to gain control of himself and calm himself for the ordeal of pretense and concealment. He realized that his nerves were in rags.

A prolonged stop of the taxi on account of a collision that had occurred just ahead made him wish that his car had run amuck and that he had been killed. He would rather have been carried back to Jessup on a stretcher than to endure any longer the knowledge of

the step he had taken against her. But the pause made it possible for him to regain command of his nerves. He lit a cigarette and drew deep breaths of its quieting fumes into his lungs.

As he smoked and grew calmer, the old imperious love with which he had pursued Jessup, mercifully revived. The irresistible magic with which she had moved into his life reoccupied him with its glow. The sorcery of her charm ran through him like a sparkling river. Her image floated exquisitely before him.

Again the car was in motion, and as it traversed the remaining half-mile, Banning leaned forward eagerly, ready to leap out the moment he reached his destination.

Jessup admitted him.

"Do you know," she said, "I had my key with me after all. I discovered it when I got home. Wasn't it ridiculous of me?"

"Nothing you could possibly do could ever be ridiculous!" exclaimed Banning, taking her in his arms. "Everything about you is perfect. Forgive me for staying away from home this evening. I could hardly wait until I got back to you. Please don't ever stop loving me, Diana. You don't know how dear you are to me."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE waning afternoon was gradually dimming the light in Jessup's studio, so that at length, scarcely able to distinguish the outlines of the impressions she had been jotting down on a pad of paper, she abandoned her effort and sat dreaming in the dusk. She had been absorbedly experimenting with costumes for various figures. One was a Moorish prince with a sash of red cashmere, a jewel-encrusted sword-belt, and a great emerald smoldering in his white turban. She had tried her hand at a Desdemona, draping her in the palest of vapory blues, in silvers and in golds, with a trellis of pearls entwining a head of gorgeous hair; at a Brünnehilde in luminous robes. She had been sketching sandals and scarves and laces. She wondered why Hamlet should invariably be played in inky blacks, and whether melancholy could not be more effectively expressed by brooding purples, or even by red, which was the color of mourning in the Denmark of Hamlet's time.

Royalty in gold and ermine, cardinals and priests, Valkyrian figures hovering over mediæval battlefields, Colonial creatures amazingly hooped and panniered, Alpine peasants in red stomachers and gaudy mittens, curious exotic types from everywhere had for months

been passing in a continuous stream before her on her drawing-board as she searched for certain effects. Here in the studio, Jessup lived in a world of costume. She tested the values of all manner of girdles, tunics, hoods; of pleatings and frills and bandeaux; of colors in innumerable combinations.

The human frame was her stage; colors and textiles and plumes and furs and jewels were the actors on that stage. She too was an architect, but she did not build with wood and rock and masonry. The human body was the landscape on which she built; she took the forms of men and women and covered them up. What was the source of this craving, she wondered, to drape and garb and cover things up? What were its origins and its impulse? Had it anything to do, she wondered, with her own pretense to be someone that she was not?

Sinking deeper into her reverie, she recalled the momentary sense of panic that had filled her when Herbert Dodge had turned to the portrait of the ancestor and had mistaken it for a voice teacher by the name of Ganton. She had not seen or heard from Dodge since the day she had insulted him. Even that absurd and ludicrous picture of him on his knees had been fading from her memory.

Ivan had been singularly tender to her of late; at times she had thought that she detected an unnatural wistfulness in his manner; and again she had perceived a disturbing taciturnity that she could not fathom. Christmas had come and gone, but Ivan had avoided bringing her and his mother together during the holidays.

Jessup did not know that Ivan was with his mother at this moment, and that they were heatedly discussing her. At noon that day Mrs. Banning had telephoned her son, stating that she had an important piece of news for him, and that she must see him immediately. Ivan had presently left his office, and now a brief but tense scene was being enacted in the home of Mrs. Banning.

"You didn't tell me the truth, Ivan, about that investigation in St. Louis. You assured me you had received no report," Ivan's mother was saying.

"Well?" he replied defiantly.

"I have myself communicated with that law firm," she answered sententiously.

"You did?"

"I most assuredly did. And I find that instead of your having heard nothing, as you have claimed, you have had a complete report of the most sweeping and damning nature in your possession for at least one month. Why have you attempted to cover it up?"

"Because I didn't think it concerned me," returned Ivan firmly.

"Oh, you didn't think it concerned you?" was the contemptuous response. "Well, it does concern you, and what is more, it concerns me and it concerns your sister. I never got such a shock before in my life. I'm frank to say I suspected that all was not precisely as this woman had represented. I believed all along that that vague and flimsy account of her family was largely invented. It was like pulling teeth to get anything out of her. But the actual truth of it!"

Mrs. Banning's final words were uttered in a half-hysterical tone. Her lips came grimly together, and in her eyes was an outraged look.

"Do you mean to say that you believe all that rot?" asked Ivan, forcing himself to appear calm.

"There isn't any doubt of it!" exclaimed the mother. "The proofs are conclusive. I want you to know that I've gone to the trouble of having every phase of this affair absolutely confirmed. The proofs are in documentary form in the hands of my own lawyers."

Again Mrs. Banning's voice broke and now she began to weep. Ivan sat looking at her pityingly, and after a moment he crossed to her to comfort her.

"It has taken ten years out of me," whimpered his mother. "The humiliation of it is more than I can endure. Dear heavens, why couldn't you have taken my advice and let her alone? I could see that there was only tragedy ahead. I could sense it."

"What's done is done," answered Banning.

"But it's got to be undone."

"There's nothing that *can* be undone."

"Ivan!" cried the mother.

"Yes, mother."

"Just what do you mean?" she asked hoarsely.

"I've thought everything carefully over, and I've made up my mind to stick," said Banning in a voice that left no doubt as to his determination.

"What?" gasped his mother.

Banning repeated what he had said.

"Are you demented?" she cried.

"No, I think not."

"Then you don't know what you're saying!"

"I know exactly what I'm saying."

"You can't possibly know what you're saying," protested Mrs. Banning savagely. "Don't you dare stand there and say that you do! I tell you the situation is impossible. It's untenable. It's the most disgusting thing I ever heard of. It's hideous. It's a nightmare. Why, that woman is illegitimate!"

There was a frenzy in Mrs. Banning's voice and a frenzy in her eyes. She seized Ivan's wrist and grasped it so hard that he winced under the pressure of her rings.

"Please don't excite yourself, mother," said Ivan.

"Illegitimate, I tell you," said the other in withering voice. "An illegitimate of the lowest level."

A look of grim ferocity hardened in Banning's eyes.

"Please!" he protested.

"Be still! An illegitimate, I tell you. Born in a dive. Do you hear me—in a dive! With God only knows what for a father, and a common harlot for a mother. And you stand there and try to defend her. Oh, get out of my sight!"

Banning went back to his office. The violent words of his mother rang like a knell in his ears. Like a knell they rang in his ears, beating back and forth against the walls of his brain.

"Mr. Murray wants to see you," said Banning's secretary.

Banning did not answer. He sat dazedly at his desk, oblivious of the time of the day, aware of nothing but

the gruesome words that his mother had slung into his face.

"Hello, Banning," said Murray. "Come into my office, will you please?"

Banning obeyed mechanically, and Murray closed the door behind them.

"Have you seen your mother?" asked the architect in his gruff but kindly voice.

"Yes."

"She talked to me about this unfortunate matter. You know, you can't very well ignore her wishes. You can't detach yourself from your family. And even if you wanted to and even if you could, you'd have to consider your relation to society generally, and last but not least your relation to your business."

The architect placed his hand affectionately on Banning's shoulder, and continued: "I know pretty well how you feel. I can understand why you resent the idea of throwing her over."

"I couldn't do that," said Banning, shaking his head.

"She has charm. Exceptional charm. And an extraordinary amount of talent," returned the head of the firm. "It's a shame something like this had to happen. It isn't her fault. She just happens to be the victim. I can fully understand your generous impulse. I can see how you want to be decent about it. But this is one of those cases in which society simply won't let you."

"Society!" snarled Banning. "What the hell has society to do with it? This is my business. It's my own personal and private affair."

"Your attitude is very admirable," answered Murray, soothingly. He inserted the tip of a cigarette in a tortoise-shell holder, lit the cigarette with a flourish, and added: "Ordinarily I should be the last man in the world to interfere with so generous an impulse, but——"

"Generous?" interrupted Banning with sudden fury. "It isn't a case of generosity. God damn it, I love her!"

The older architect sighed. "I know, old man," he said sympathetically. "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not trying to turn you against her. Why should I? I wish her all the luck in the world. But we've got to look at this thing in a more practical way."

Murray's heavy grayish teeth came together with a click. He was balancing himself alternately on his heels and toes. His arms were folded and the smoke of his cigarette was trailing upward along the sleeve of his coat toward the shoulder.

"Well, I don't want to discuss it," replied Banning sullenly.

"It's got to be discussed," was the unyielding response. "I've got to know where you stand."

"You know exactly where I stand."

"Your stand is incompatible with the interests of this firm," declared the older man solemnly. "It's against your own business interests. You would make yourself and your associates the objects of inevitable ridicule. Too many people know about this matter already. It can't go on."

Banning was staring gloomily into space. Suddenly

he burst out: "I had no idea you were such a prude! For Christ's sake what are you afraid of? Is my professional standing, is your professional standing on such thin ice that it's going to crack under the weight of gossip? Let the half-wits talk!"

"But my dear fellow," argued the other earnestly, "it means something worse. It means social ostracism."

"What if it does?"

"Ah, but clients aren't secured that way and they aren't held that way. It can't be done."

"Then what do you want me to do? Resign?" demanded Banning, grimly.

"No, I shouldn't like to see you do that. But even if you did, how could that possibly solve *your* problem?"

"Oh, I suppose I could scrape together enough money for us to live abroad," said Banning scornfully.

"That wouldn't solve it either," answered Murray.

"Since when has the world become so pious?" demanded Banning bitterly. "I don't know any men who have led such blameless lives. Do you? And as for women, why, they're running absolutely wild these days. There's more carousing than there ever was. I'd like to know why two people can't be permitted to lead a quiet, decent life together."

"What you say is perfectly true," conceded Murray. "But it isn't a matter of logic. It's a matter of deep, unreasoning, and ineradicable prejudice. It's perfectly true that the world condones immorality. But there

is one thing that the world does not overlook or condone and that thing is a questionable paternity."

Banning did not answer. In appearance he was calm, but beneath the surface he was writhing under the welt left by the other's final blow.

"So you see," spoke Murray in a softer tone, "there isn't anything else to do. The marriage has got to be annulled. Don't make an outcast of yourself. It wouldn't do you any good and it wouldn't do the woman any good. If she really cares for you, she wouldn't want it anyway. You can be grateful that you made this discovery before you had any children. Don't you suppose that she must have some knowledge of all this?"

"I don't know," said Banning with a deadened voice. "I don't think she has."

"It's not a pleasant thing for her to have to find out."

Banning groaned.

"Have you questioned her at all?"

"No."

"Then I'd let my lawyers inform her," said Murray decisively.

"No, I couldn't do that."

"Don't attempt to put yourself through the agony of that sort of a scene with her," begged Murray. "It's much better to let your lawyers handle it."

"No, it's too brutal."

"Nonsense. Putting it up to your lawyers places the entire episode on a purely professional basis. They can be depended upon to treat with your wife in a tact-

ful and kindly manner. It will save both you and her from the emotional strain of the other method. In fairness to you both, it is by far the wiser way to proceed," was the suave reply.

Banning sat limp and dejected in his chair. The fighting quality in him had subsided. He felt beaten and frustrated. He knew that he lacked the inherent stamina to wage further war against the odds that were massed against him. He lacked the vitality. He did not agree with his mother, and he did not agree with Daniel J. Murray. He knew that there was something subtly selfish, something essentially narrow and mean and cowardly about their arrogant points of view. But he felt unable to hold out any longer. For he knew that their hammering derived its power from a strength and will far deeper and more profound than their own strength and will as individuals. It was an austere and somber symbol of a formidable world of unrelenting tradition and coagulated shams.

It came to him in a flash that this arrogant world which had nurtured and pampered him had rendered him incapable of brandishing a sword against it now and defying its conventions. He wished he were able to indulge in heroics and to carry into dramatic action the chivalric impulses that glowed and glistened inside of him; but the ease in which he had grown to manhood, and the years of unquestioning acceptance of the world as he had found it, had made the effort impossible. He realized that it was too late. The rugged stuff of heroism was not in him. Even the love that

had spurred him on into momentary fortitude and defiance, was incapable of thrusting him on.

With a resigned and beaten air, he bade Murray good night. Murray knew and Banning knew that the surrender was complete and unconditional.

"Let me know if there is anything I can do," said the older man when he was starting away.

"All right."

"Count on me for every assistance."

"Thanks."

"She'll understand," said the old architect, wringing Banning's hand sympathetically.

Banning instructed his secretary to telephone his home that he would be detained for dinner. Unable to face Diana to-night, he set out alone for one of his clubs. He had to be alone; he had to think; he had to plan how to deliver the blow that had to be struck. He was filled with a creepy sensation; he felt like a sneaking footpad.

He recalled that Diana was getting ready for a public exhibition of her sketches at one of the art galleries. Her exhibition opened to-morrow. Well, he reflected, it would help occupy her mind after the descent of the blow that had to be delivered. But it was a frightful thing to have to do. It was like striking with a sandbag in the dark.

CHAPTER XIX

THE opening of Jessup's exhibition found her in a state of nervous expectation. She had enjoyed the weeks of preparation, the selection of subjects, the ordering of frames, the cataloguing and hanging. The volume of work she had turned out, its variety, its freedom and swing, the wild barbaric quality of some of it gave her peculiar sensations of satisfaction. She could perceive in some of her sketches the indubitable record of certain phases of her temperament that she fancied she could never have caught and fixed through the medium of any other art. She recognized with secret satisfaction that here and there she had caught true impressions of fugitive and volatile elements of her deeper self in a manner that almost frightened her. These chords and strains and fugues seemed to express her inner self.

In this mysterious minstrelsy of the brush and pen, she wondered if others could discern the meaning. There were sketches in which horns and trumpets blared her defiance of the whole world, and there were others in which flutes and oboes sounded plaintive overtones that she hoped no one but herself would detect.

Now that she inspected her work in the gallery's flood of light, she felt ashamed of its imperfections. She was aware of her shortcomings. In studies that

she had regarded as sufficiently finished to show, she now saw only the rudiments of the themes she had endeavored to convey. She felt conscious of her lack of more schooling. She remembered nightmares in which, sitting at the wheel of fast-moving motor cars, she had suddenly realized that she knew nothing about driving and had been seized with a paralyzing sense of panic. She had experienced a similar feeling immediately after her marriage to Ivan, and she felt that way now as she gazed with misgivings at the display of her work.

Ivan had seemed enthusiastic concerning her approaching exhibition, but she wondered now whether he had been genuinely so, or had merely pretended to be. He had not been home to dinner on the night before the opening, and had only returned after she had retired. In the morning he had eaten a hurried breakfast, had seemed preoccupied, and had rushed away, hoping to be able to join her at the gallery that afternoon, but because of a pressure of appointments he had been unable to promise definitely. It was now nearly five o'clock, and he had not yet come.

Notices of the exhibition had been sent to a considerable mailing list, and the New York newspapers had made generous announcements of the event. The old publicity concerning Jessup's stage career, her "hit" in musical comedy, the discovery of her talent as a theatrical costume designer, her marriage to Ivan Banning, had been dug up and rehashed in most of the dailies. It made a diverting and romantic story.

Numerous visitors from Broadway had strolled in to

see her pictures. Among them was Charles Salant, who, as sponsor for Jessup's first efforts in this field, had of course figured in the newspaper stories. He was the same dapper person, with the old look of frank admiration.

"You don't mean to tell me you've done all this?" he demanded. "By Jove, you're the fastest thing I ever saw with a brush. Don't you ever sleep? Or play? Why haven't you been to see me lately? How is that husband of yours? You know I bear him a first-class grudge. He stole you away from me," he said with lowered tone. "But he'd better look out. I haven't forgotten you."

Jessup looked at him and laughed quietly. It did not offend her to-day to be admired. She remembered how near she had come to surrendering herself to Salant. She remembered how incapable she had been of doing so when it came to the actual decision, and how in the end she had rushed to the telephone in response to Ivan's persistent ringing, and how she had begged him to come to her.

Nordahl, the unforgettable director of rehearsals in the hot, steamy air of Bryant Hall, also ran in. He looked a little older. With the incessant grind of producing musical comedies, he was still the busiest man on Broadway. But there was no perceptible diminution in the nervous energy of the grizzled old man of the theater. The same laconic quality dominated every word he spoke. He had probably never uttered a long sentence in his life.

"Ah, Miss Jessup," he said, "I haven't seen much of

you. Now I know why. You've been working. This is your field. I told you so. Keep it up. Don't let anyone stop you. This is what we need. Without the right costumes we haven't got a show. We can't rely on Cain's storehouse. What have you got there?" he demanded, going to one of the sketches.

"Oh, just a try at *Peer Gynt*," replied Jessup apologetically.

"I don't understand it," muttered the manager, screwing up his eyes. "What kind of a kid was he?"

"An Ibsen kid," smiled Jessup, doubting if Nordahl had never heard of Ibsen.

"I know. I've read *Peer Gynt* in four languages," he surprised Jessup by answering. "But I don't get him. You keep at it. You're all right. You draw a damn sight better than you danced. I've got to run. I'm rehearsing two new shows. They won't let me rest. I've got too many girls who can't dance. My God, they don't even know how to walk. Where they get them I don't know. I've got to teach them everything. It keeps me frantic."

Poor Nordahl, mused Jessup, watching him rush away. He had been the first to show her any kindness during her efforts to get a foothold on Broadway. He had even been good enough to come to her wedding. She would never forget the reassuring absence of sex in his tired eyes. In her reminiscent mood she thought of Franz Sadner, the orchestrator, and how she had watched him enviously one night as he sat in a cheap restaurant writing on the back of a menu. She had assumed that he was composing, but had been sur-

prised to find that he was doing sums; she wondered what had become of Sadner and if he was still worried about his finances and making records of his debts over his coffee and stew. She remembered hearing it said that for twenty years the brunt of Broadway's orchestration had fallen upon Franz Sadner, that his genius had taken countless commonplace scores and embroidered them into musical distinction, that his touch had transferred one hopeless song after another into an instantaneous hit. She did not know that Sadner had been dead for nearly a year and that he had died with his name unknown except to a limited inner circle of producers and composers and orchestra men; while Jessup, a newcomer on Broadway and gifted with but meager talent, had in a few brief years developed a larger earning-power than she had ever hoped to have, and had become so well known that people were arriving in flocks to see her pictures and the newspapers were praising her exhibition.

Life seemed a curious jumble to her. She did not understand its ironic twists of fortune; she could not understand why she, with her dubious background, should have been singled out for the good fortune that had come to her.

Among the visitors was an American portrait painter of eminence, who, having dropped in at the gallery on another errand, paused out of idle curiosity for a look at her sketches. In appearance he was distinguished: his figure was tall and spare and he carried himself with a dignity closely related to disdain.

His face was tanned and his straight nose and long slender cheeks bore the severe stamp of breeding. In dress he was precise. There was a constrained elasticity about his movements, and he seemed surrounded by an invisible atmosphere of coolness, distance, and authority. He looked forbidding and remote. There was none of the flair of the Latin Quarter about him. He was an Academician and looked it.

His grey eyes were moving from object to object with a deliberate and searching air. They seemed to brood and ponder. Finally his gaze came to a stop at one of Jessup's sketches. He said to his companion:

"There's a beginning of something there. Who did them?"

"A Miss Jessup."

"Who is she?"

"She used to be on the stage, I believe. Wife of a young architect in partnership with Murray. Do you know her work?"

The other shook his head taciturnly. "An English artist?" he inquired.

"American, I believe."

"Apparently under the Russian influence," said the painter.

"Bakst?" suggested his companion.

"Perhaps. I don't know. She has originality. And a curious sort of imaginative energy. Look at that satyr. Humph, I rather like that."

The proprietor of the gallery, recognizing the portrait painter, hastened to welcome him. And a moment later, he asked permission to introduce him to Jessup.

"How do you do," said Jessup, looking up into the piercing eyes of the noted painter with a definite feeling of awe. "Of course I know your work. Who doesn't?"

The painter bowed.

"It's embarrassing to have *you* see my work," added Jessup. "Please don't look at any more of it," *she* begged with an uncontrollable sense of dismay.

A smile played round the other's grave eyes. "Why not?" he asked. "You have talent."

Jessup flushed. "Do you really think so?" she exclaimed. "Or are you only saying it?" she demanded earnestly.

"It is many years since I have been guilty of saying what I did not think," answered the painter aloofly.

"Then dare I ask you to criticize my sketches?" ventured Jessup with an odd feeling of agitation.

"I don't know that I can," was the reticent reply.

"Please," she begged. Never before had she been quite so anxious for another's judgment.

For fully a minute, the painter gazed in silence at one of her sketches, while Jessup waited for this frigid personage to speak.

"You have a scorn for some of the conventions," he said at length. "I don't object to your freedom. Where did you study?"

Jessup told him.

"They didn't teach you very much," he continued brusquely. "Your trend hasn't followed your schooling. No one taught you this rebellion. It's instinctive, isn't it?"

"I don't know."

"You know color. You manage to keep fairly clear of muddy effects. You can get your somber impressions, you know, without being muddy."

"Am I too fantastic?" asked Jessup, hungry for this man's appraisal of her work.

"No."

Her critic lapsed into silence. Then he said: "But you know, in spite of your rather extraordinary freedom, I get the feeling of a curious sort of restraint. You sometimes seem to get started one way and then you seem to be afraid. You apply the brakes. You peter out. You wind up with a pinched effect. You seem to be covering something up. You're withholding something. Hiding something. Isn't that right?"

"Perhaps," she answered with the feeling that this man was looking straight through her.

"Has no one ever told you that?" he asked.

"No."

"I should like sometime to see some of the work you are not exhibiting," he added reflectively. Then he bowed abruptly and strode away.

Jessup, following him with her eyes, was glad that she had met him, but was glad that he was gone. He had made her inexplicably uncomfortable. It was a relief that his forbidding eyes were no longer on her, no longer on her work.

The painter strode in silence up the avenue with his companion.

"There's something about those sketches back there

that interests me," he said presently. "Perhaps it's their grotesque, barbaric quality. Do you know, there is a good deal of that buried in me."

"In you?"

"More than you would suspect."

"But your entire method is just the opposite. You paint with the severest of restraint. You've always painted that way."

"I know," said the portraitist. "And I always shall. And yet there is another side to me that never gets on canvas."

"That's interesting," said the other, waiting for the artist to continue.

"It wasn't without an effort, a terrific effort at times, that I have painted with the restraint you speak of. If I had ever let go, I might have become the most obstreperous of the radicals."

His friend laughed incredulously. "Are you serious?"

"Quite."

"It's impossible to think of you that way."

"And yet the elements of it are all pent up inside of me," spoke the painter contemplatively. "That young woman's work brings it all back."

"Then why don't you cut loose?" asked the other.

The painter shook his head. "It's too late. They'd think I had gone crazy."

"I dare say they would."

"I should no longer be considered safe and sane," added the painter dryly.

As the men were approaching the studio, they met

two nuns coming from the opposite direction. The painter stepped deferentially aside to let them pass.

It was an elaborate studio into which the painter ushered his companion. Its stained glass and rugs and tapestries, its cabinets, potteries, chests and curious boxes suggested world-wide quests and fastidious choosing. On an easel beneath the slanting skylight stood a tall canvas on the rough surface of which clung the unfinished but gorgeous image of New York's newest grand opera star.

The visitor gave an exclamation of delight.

"You recognize her?" asked the painter.

The other spoke her name. "How many sittings does it represent?" he inquired.

"Three."

"You work with the same old speed," was the admiring reply.

"Some Scotch and soda," said the painter to his servant.

"Those nuns we just passed," said his friend, "reminded me of a remark you once made. It must have been twenty or twenty-five years ago. It was down in St. Louis, I believe. Or was it Chicago? You were in the clutch of Huysmans at the time. You were quoting Huysmans on nuns, to the effect that the real punishment they endure is 'the ardent, wild regret for that maternity of which they are ignorant.' Do you remember?"

A reminiscent look drifted into the painter's eyes. He nodded.

"Curious how a chance remark like that will stick

to the mind," continued the other. "I never see a nun but what I think of it. 'The desolate womb of a woman revolting,' or words to that effect. You were wondering if the same didn't apply to prostitutes. Remember?"

Again the painter nodded. A stream of reverie bore him back among blurred and misty memories. The images grew clearer. He was thinking of a hot summer night, and of a street lined by a row of poplar trees from whose boughs came a continuous whispering—a somber murmuring of tongues of green in summer and a sharper cackling from brown dry throats after frost.

"The girl you had that night seemed to have made quite an impression on you," continued his companion reminiscently.

"I faintly recall the episode, but not the girl," said the painter.

"You kept harping on her. I recall that you grew more or less sentimental. She had seemed to you rather dainty and refined. Didn't you actually get to speculating as to whether a woman like that ever had children?"

"I believe I did," said the painter meditatively. "You contended that you had never heard of cradles in a brothel."

"And you argued that many a time a foundling was discovered on someone's doorstep. It seemed that this girl had taken something of a fancy to you. Something or other that she had said seemed to have set you to wondering. I tried to find out what the devil

she could have said to make you take it all so seriously."

The artist was lost in contemplation.

"Well, we were both young and disillusioned," said the other.

"Yes, of course," said the artist, with a smile.

For an instant his smile was blent with a vague and tenuous look of speculation. But it vanished as quickly as it had flitted to his face, and he reached for his glass and drank.

"When are you sailing?" asked the other.

"On the twenty-seventh," answered the painter.

"You lucky dog. I haven't been in Europe since the war. You haven't missed a year, have you? I want you to dine with us before you leave."

"I shall be glad to. How is your family?"

"First-rate."

"Isn't your daughter studying singing?" asked the painter.

"Yes. We're sending her abroad in another year," answered the other with paternal satisfaction.

"Whom are you sending her to?"

"Oh, she's got her heart set on some Italian over there. I can't remember his name to save my life. I had an idea that all the good teachers had made a bee-line for over here, but to attempt to reason with the young lady is like talking to an iron fence. Am I right in supposing that there are plenty of fine voice teachers over here?"

"I'm sure I can't say," replied the painter.

"I thought you knew that musical crowd pretty well.

I hardly ever set foot in your studio but I find you painting some prima donna. And if I'm not mistaken, the first portrait of yours that you ever showed me was of some singer, wasn't it?"

"I really don't remember."

"Yes, I remember it distinctly. It was an old fellow who wore a stock. Who was he, anyway?"

"Do you mean Ganton, the singing teacher?" asked the artist.

"Ganton. That's who it was."

"He died long before my portrait of him was ever painted. I worked from a photograph. It was one of my early pot-boilers," answered the painter with a deprecatory smile.

CHAPTER XX

JESSUP was aware of a tense unnaturalness in Ivan's attitude toward her. He kept asserting that he was not good enough for her. For the past two days he had hardly touched his breakfast and had been away for dinner, not returning to the apartment until late at night. She wondered if a misfortune had occurred and what he was concealing.

The nervous tension created by his manner and by his absence roused her apprehensions. Instinctively she associated Ivan's conduct with the old enmity of his mother. This notion was strengthened on the evening following the opening of the exhibition, when Mrs. Banning telephoned her son's apartment. Jessup answered.

"Is Mr. Banning there?" asked his mother.

"No, he hasn't come in. This is Diana," replied Jessup.

"Tell him to call up his mother if he returns," said Mrs. Banning icily and hung up.

The curt answer and abrupt disconnection were so deliberate an insult that the episode left Jessup shaken with momentary surprise. But the rage that Jessup might ordinarily have felt at such an affront did not well up in her in this instance. Neither did she feel wounded. A singular reaction took place. She felt

a sudden profound superiority to the other's narrowness and meanness of spirit. A pride, a self-esteem, a cold hauteur dominated her. She felt a sustaining fortitude. It came to her that she possessed something above and beyond the bickering, the petulant wrangling of families at odds with themselves.

A spiritual calmness enveloped her. The ill-tempered words of Banning's mother had made the listener realize that those paltry words and the tone in which they were uttered must have issued from something that was inherently petty and ignoble. For the first time since Ivan had loomed up in her life, she felt herself to be his equal and the equal of his family. The deep-rooted and lingering conviction of inferiority was gone.

Jessup felt uncannily different. Marriage, instead of providing a refuge from herself, had finally revealed to her that she was tangibly above the plane on which Ivan's mother moved. Marriage, instead of fusing her blood-stream with a better one, had shown her a sluggish and impoverished life-stream that seemed to be trickling malignly through hardened family arteries. Marriage, instead of strengthening her own doubtful position, had disclosed gullies and waste lands.

While Jessup was in the midst of these contemplations, Ivan arrived. For forty-eight hours he had been tormented by the imperative responsibility of telling Jessup what he knew, and his face was bitten by worry. His eyes were grim and gloomy.

"Your mother wants you to telephone her," Jessup informed him.

"When did she call up?" he asked, grateful for something else to talk about.

"It must have been several hours ago. She wanted you to call her if you came in," replied Jessup.

Banning went to the telephone.

"Hello, mother," he said. "Diana says you wanted me to call you."

"Have you seen your lawyers?" asked Mrs. Banning abruptly.

"Not yet."

"When do you intend to?" she demanded.

"As soon as I get time. I've been frightfully busy. I hardly know where I'm at."

"Don't you realize that this action *must* be begun?"

"Yes, of course, I realize it," said Banning with utter weariness.

"Then please get at it. Don't let another day go by. Have you spoken to *her*?"

"Not yet."

"Aren't you going to?"

"Yes, I gave you my word that I would."

"When are you going to?"

"To-night."

"Do it without fail," implored Ivan's mother. "There isn't another moment to be lost. It's maddening the way you dawdle along and let things drift. I should think you'd have more self-respect. It's perfectly stupid of you to delay another minute. As for trying to keep it all out of the newspapers, I don't know about that. I'm beginning to think that the repudia-

tion ought to be made public. That may be the only way to shut people up."

Banning was listening to his mother in a sort of trance. When he hung up, he did not see Jessup in the room. He was glad to be alone for a moment. He went to his liquor cabinet for a drink. Then he sank his teeth into a cigar and began to smoke.

When Jessup reëntered, she found him staring fixedly at the portrait.

"You've been getting some good notices on your exhibit," he said in a colorless voice.

"Yes, the papers have been very generous. Have you had a chance to look in on it?" asked Jessup.

"Not yet. I've been tied up in a knot. Many people there?"

"Yes, quite a number."

Banning lapsed into silence. It had been an effort for him to talk. Again his eyes roved to the portrait.

"Do you remember the time Dodge noticed something about that picture of yours? A similarity to a voice teacher by the name of Ganton?" he asked, unable to defer the issue any longer. Now that he had begun, the constraint was no longer in his tone.

"Yes," answered Jessup.

"Dodge was right. That *does* happen to be Ganton," stated Banning with a sudden strictness in his voice.

Jessup met his look squarely. "I think you must be mistaken," she said quietly.

"I happen to know that I'm not mistaken," answered Banning. "That isn't Amos Jessup. That's Ganton,

the voice teacher. I'm curious to know how you happened to get hold of it."

"It was sent on to me."

"About how long has it been in your family?"

"I can't say. What makes you think it's someone else?"

"I don't think so. I know it."

"Just what do you know?"

Jessup listened in silence to his recital of the facts that had been detailed to his mother.

"I have a book here on voice culture," finished Banning, crossing to the bookshelves for a volume. "It contains a reproduction of it. Here it is. You can compare them yourself."

Jessup looked in amazement at an engraving of the familiar subject.

"Yes, it's the same picture," she conceded. "But surely there is some mistake about it."

"There isn't any mistake," said Banning impatiently. "The author was a recognized authority—an old-timer. He was a contemporary of Ganton. He knew him intimately."

Jessup felt as if the ground had been cut out from under her. A few hours ago it would have unnerved her. But she no longer felt dependent upon the structure of pretense that she had reared.

"Then my people must have been grossly deceived," she said steadily.

"Either that, or else I have been grossly deceived," retorted Banning.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't mean about this picture. That's only a detail. I can see how a mistake like that might be made. There was probably nothing to identify the picture. It isn't even signed. It might have borne a resemblance to some ancestor of yours. Haven't you any photograph of Amos Jessup?"

"No, I never saw one."

"Look here, Diana. This opens up a subject that has got to be threshed out. I don't want to say anything to hurt you. But I'm afraid you've been laboring under some serious misapprehensions. To your absolute knowledge, was there ever an Amos Jessup?" asked Banning in a charitable voice.

"I have naturally supposed so," she answered. "But of course that's going pretty far back." She was determined to find out how much Ivan knew.

"Yes. It's going pretty far back. But let me ask you this. You say both your mother and your father died when you were a small girl?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get your information about that St. Louis branch of your family?"

"From my Grandfather Helman."

"The carpet weaver?"

"Yes."

"So he's the one who told you about your father's people having been in the grain business in Missouri and Kansas?"

A frown settled upon Jessup's face. "Just what is the point of this cross-examination, may I ask? First it's your mother who bombards me with questions.

Then it's you. What are you driving at? What are you trying to find out?" she asked crisply.

"If that's what Helman told *you*, he tells a different story now," said Banning, watching Jessup's face as he spoke.

"You say he tells a different story now. To whom does he tell a different story now?"

"To representatives who were sent to interview him."

"Whose representatives? Your mother's?"

"No. We can leave my mother out of this. My own representatives."

"So that's it? Then you didn't believe what I told you? You doubted my word? You thought I lied?"

"No, it wasn't that, Diana. But I had reasons to believe that your understanding of some of these things was not entirely correct. The whole thing was started by Dodge's discovery about the picture. When he backed up his first impression of it, and proved that he was right, you can see for yourself that I had to take some action."

"Dodge!" said Jessup with contempt. "Do you want to know the reason for his malicious meddling?"

"I didn't know he was prompted by malice," said Banning with surprise.

"It was nothing but malice. I don't suppose you know that this Dodge who posed as such a good friend of yours was making love to me?"

"What!" exclaimed Banning. "He made love to you?"

"Yes. He said everything he could to belittle you.

Every time your back was turned, he made love to me.”

“How could he make love to you if you didn’t let him?” demanded Banning angrily.

“It amused me for a while to hear him rave,” said Jessup. “To see what a fool he could make of himself. Finally I had to tell him what a blithering ass he was. This is his revenge.”

Banning stared at his wife in silence. “If that’s what he did, then why didn’t you tell me before?” There was a note of bluster in his voice.

“Because I didn’t want to interfere with your business relations. I didn’t want to destroy your confidence in him.”

“Did you think it was fair to me?” asked Banning, letting his anger rise. “So that’s why he kept trailing us in the park? You liked him. That’s what you did. You were getting tired of me even then. You let this fellow make love to you because you liked it. You liked it, I tell you. How do I know what you let him do? How do I know how far I can trust you? My God, we haven’t been married a year. How do I know how many fellows you’ve let run after you?”

Jessup looked at him pityingly during his outburst. “Is that what you think of me?” she asked.

“How do I know what to think of you? You tell me one thing. Someone else tells me another. Why wouldn’t I be suspicious? You tell me a big rigmarole about your people in St. Louis, and the records don’t show anything of the kind. Why did you conceal your name when you came to New York?”

"That's exactly what I did not do," said Jessup calmly.

"You concealed the name 'Helman,' didn't you?"

"No, I didn't conceal it. When I went on the stage, I simply dropped it."

"You knew 'Jessup' was your first name. Why did you try to lead me to believe it was your last name? That's what I want to know."

Jessup looked at Banning without flinching. She said: "I think perhaps you know the answer to that question."

Her reply caused Banning's anger to become mingled with compassion. "Yes, your surmise is correct. I do happen to know the answer to that question. But do you?" he asked with an effort to temper and subdue his tone.

"I think I do," said Jessup quietly.

Her matter-of-fact reply was confusing to Banning. He said with the same studied and compassionate mildness: "I'm afraid you don't understand what I mean. I don't want to hurt you. But at the same time it is absolutely necessary for you to grasp certain facts. One is the fact of doubtful paternity."

"Yes," answered Jessup, waiting for him to go on.

Banning looked surprised. "You already know that?" he asked.

"I do."

"Do you know where your mother was living prior to your birth?"

"Yes, I know that, too."

"I don't mean the city. I mean the place. The

kind of a house," continued Banning, fairly blurting the ominous words in order to get them uttered.

Jessup saw his gaze move away from her before he had finished what he was saying. She was silent for only a moment. During that moment of hesitation she realized that a month ago, a week ago, even a few hours ago she would have recognized this as the moment to begin a piece of acting that she had secretly and repeatedly rehearsed in anticipation of just this crisis. With exquisite care she had prepared the things to say and exactly how to say them. So thoroughly and so painstakingly had she versed herself as to how to conduct herself if this crisis should ever arise, that she had felt able to enact her part of the scene with flawless accuracy and effect no matter when the cue might be given.

And yet, now that that moment had come, she knew that she was changed; she knew that she did not have to put herself through any such performance.

"I mean the place. The kind of house," Banning was saying, blurting his words in order to get them spoken.

"I know all about it," answered Jessup without a sign of emotion.

Banning, who had been in torture for the past two days at the prospect of having to tell her, could hardly credit her reply. Her unemotional disclosure that she already knew, left him in a peculiar state of bewilderment, and among his emotions was that of disappointment. For so carefully had he prepared himself to say what had to be said, and to season his pro-

nouncement with appropriate mercy, that it seemed to him that he had been cheated and defrauded of something that was due him.

His carefully prepared gentleness left him. A baffled scowl rose to his face.

"You know all about it?" he asked acridly.

Jessup nodded.

"So you know all about it, do you?" he said, as if dazed by the information.

"I do."

"How long have you known it?" he asked with ill-concealed resentment.

"Since just before I left the Helmans."

The scowl on Banning's face deepened. A snarl made its way into his voice. "So you knew it at the time we were married, did you? And I trusted you. And all the while you were lying to me. You were cooking up one big lie after another. By God, I don't believe there's a word of truth in you. You lied to me, and strung me along, and made a fool out of me. I don't believe you know how to tell the truth." Banning pointed an accusing finger at the portrait, and exclaimed: "I'll bet that picture was never in your family at all!"

"No, it wasn't until I bought it."

"Until you bought it!" thundered Banning. "That's just what I suspected."

"Yes, and I picked the other one up on Sixth Avenue," answered Jessup with the same unexcited, unemotional calmness.

"Then every move you've made has been a lie.

What a fool I've been," he groaned. "You knew all about this and still you had the nerve to go ahead and get yourself tied up to me. What did you do it for? What were you trying to do, disgrace me and everyone connected with me? Was that your scheme in getting married?"

"No, I thought I was bettering myself."

"Bettering *yourself*!"

"I thought I was improving my station in life," added Jessup.

"Well, what about my station? This marriage has got to be annulled!" exclaimed Banning fiercely.

Jessup paid no attention to him. "I thought I was bettering myself and improving my station," she repeated with irony. "But I didn't know that I was marrying into a family that was beneath me."

"You? With your history? *You* married into a family that was beneath you?" gasped Banning, looking at her incredulously.

"I mean just what I say," said Jessup steadily.

There was a savage glow in Banning's eyes.

"Illegitimacy is a matter of circumstance, and not of blood," said Jessup. "Blood isn't illegitimate. And life isn't illegitimate. There's better blood in me than there is in you. I know it now. What happened here to-night proves it. I no longer question the blood that's in me. I know what I can do and I know what I am. Do you think the lack of a name scares me any more? No, because I can make my own name. Do you think I need yours to carry me on up? No,

I can go farther and I can go higher than you can ever go."

Ivan rose and paced the floor. His rage, checked by the quiet conviction of Jessup's words, had abated. He was listening to every word of the controlled flood of her statements. He was looking at the proud poise of her head, the flare of her nostrils, the rigid grace with which she confronted him. She stood before him at her full height, her sensitive shoulders thrown back, her white chest moving with her breath. Her face was luminous and her eyes shone.

"If this discovery of yours has been a shock to you," she continued in the same calm voice, "what do you think the effect must have been upon me when I found it out? How do you think it has felt to keep hiding it, to be forever scheming to keep it submerged and out of sight? How do you think I felt when you came and I realized that I loved you? Do you think I didn't shrink from the possibility of exposing you to the risks of exactly the thing that has happened? Do you think I entered lightly into marriage to you? Have you forgotten how I resisted it?

"Oh, I don't claim that there weren't some selfish motives mixed up in it," Jessup went on earnestly. "I was ambitious, and I wanted social station. I was afraid of what might happen if I remained alone, for there were impulses in me that I didn't trust. There was hot blood in me, and there were times when I was frightfully lonely. I wanted to feel more secure. I wanted to be esteemed and accepted. And I wanted a name. You don't know what it is to want a name."

Again Jessup paused, and the listener, silenced by her recital, offered no reply.

"Well, I accepted the risk," continued Jessup. "I allowed you to accept your share of it. I'm sorry for you, sorry that you had to find this out. But someone had to share this risk with me, for it was unendurable to me alone. Someone had to share it with me; and it happened to be you. A thousand times when I thought of what might happen, I wished that I cared for you less."

Tears sprang to Banning's eyes.

"Oh, Diana!" he said with a sob.

But Jessup stood immobile. "In a way, it's too bad," she said, still without a sign of emotion. "In another way, in a selfish way on my part, it's the best thing that could have happened. It has shown me what's in me. It has made it possible to compare myself with you, whom I used to consider my superior in so many things. Why, I stood in awe of you and the world you represented. And I've found out that I could stand up under it and that you couldn't stand up under it. It's a good thing for me to know, because I know now what kind of blood is in me. If I don't know *who* I am, at least I know *what* I am."

A new look had moved into Banning's eyes as Jessup spoke. It was a look of involuntary respect.

"Is that really the way you feel?" he asked, as if scarcely able to believe her.

"I've tried to make it as clear as I know how."

"Well," said Banning lugubriously, "I don't blame you for hating me."

"I don't hate you," answered Jessup.

Banning gazed at her thoughtfully. "You've been in for a pretty raw deal all around. It's the most unfortunate thing I ever heard of. But you've certainly acted like a brick. You're the gamest girl I ever saw."

Jessup took a cigarette from a lacquered box and tapped one end of it against her palm.

"You spoke of annulment proceedings," she replied.

"That seems a brutal thing to do. There ought to be some better solution. Let's not do anything rash. Let's take more time and think things over," said Banning unhappily.

"No, it's not a brutal thing to do. There isn't anything else to do. Even if we wanted to remain together, there would be so much pressure from the outside that we should both be miserable. You have made a mistake that can only be corrected by removing the cause. The only way you can clear yourself is by getting rid of me. There's nothing else to do."

Banning turned wretchedly. "But what will you do?"

"Pshaw! I shall be famous," answered Jessup confidently.

CHAPTER XXI

JESSUP's passage was booked on the *Celtic*, sailing on January 27th. She had been commissioned to design the costumes for five Broadway productions scheduled for the following autumn. She was on her way to Naples, Tunis, Sofia and Dresden, and was counting upon at least a month in each of these places for a study of native costume, after which it was her intention to reside indefinitely in Paris if she liked it there.

She had not seen Banning again since the night of their final clash. She had been served with the summons and complaint in his action to annul their marriage. She had glanced at the intricate legal phraseology of these documents with indifference. She had no intention of entering a defense.

In the midst of her preparations for the voyage, Doris Banning dropped in unexpectedly at the apartment.

"I heard you were going abroad," said Ivan's sister, "and I couldn't bear to have you go without seeing you again. I didn't know whether you would let me in or not, but I made up my mind to take a chance."

"I'm glad to see you," said Jessup cordially.

"I just wanted to tell you that I think my brother's attitude is disgustingly mediæval. It is inexcusable. He's nothing but a cad."

"No, I can't think of him in that way," said Jessup. "It isn't anything that he can be blamed for."

"You don't mean to say you can ever forgive him?" demanded Doris incredulously.

"It isn't for me to forgive him. It isn't a case for forgiveness. The discovery was inevitable, and his action as a result of that discovery was just as inevitable."

"Just the same, he has shown himself up. I'm ashamed of him, and I've told him so without mincing any words. I should think you would hate the sight of a Banning."

"The Bannings aren't to blame," interposed Jessup.

"Neither are you!" exclaimed Doris with spirit. "It's a crime to drive you out of the country like this."

"I'm not being driven out of the country. I'm going abroad on business, and just as soon as I feel like coming back, I'll come back," answered Jessup pleasantly.

"Good for you. You've got more pluck than all the Banning crowd put together. If Ivan had any such spirit as that, nothing could stop him. That holier-than-thou attitude of his makes me sick. And so does mother's. Nothing would delight me more than to hear some first-class skeletons in our own closet begin to rattle. Oh, how I'd relish that! I'd be tempted to cry it from the roofs as a matter of poetic justice," declared Doris. Her glance fell upon the picture of Ganton. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I couldn't part with that," put in Jessup. "I'm taking it along with me. Do you know, I actually got to believing that there was something intimate and

ancestral about it. There is something about it that makes it seem mine."

"You keep it," commanded Doris. "It isn't signed, is it? But, believe me, it's a finer piece of work in every way than most of the junk that hangs on other people's walls."

The day of sailing was near. The newspapers, having learned of her going, began sending reporters to Jessup to get the details of her plans. Half a dozen times in the past few years she had furnished a first-rate story, and some of them had made front-page features. Jessup, however, was declining steadily to be interviewed. The idea of publicity at this time irritated her.

But suddenly on the day before she was to leave, an irresistible sense of mischief took hold of her. She had concocted a series of lies in order to protect herself in her contact with life, and her marriage was about to be annulled because of those lies. Why not concoct another string of lies to advance herself in the world? She would drive in a few more nails of publicity in order to fix her name more securely in public attention. Having lied disastrously, here was an opportunity to lie successfully. Instead of slipping quietly out of the country, she would sail with a blare of headlines. The comic side of it appealed to her.

That afternoon a crowd of reporters assembled at her apartment. Jessup received them with feverish gayety, and gave a rapid and succinct account of her plans. She told of the costumes she was about to design, and hinted that she had been engaged to do similar work for producers in Moscow and Vienna.

She gave a veiled account of a forthcoming grand opera by a famous composer for which she was likewise to do the costumes. She recited the names of three or four illustrious families in London and Paris at whose homes she had been invited to be a guest.

Her interview glistened with famous names. It implied an intimate acquaintance with a dozen European celebrities who had made recent visits to America. In answer to questions she glibly gave her impressions of French and English personages whom she had never seen.

In reply to the usual volley of questions, she gave brisk and pungent views on careers for women, and on marriage, divorce, international politics, and fashions.

Throughout the interview, she was thinking of Ivan's mother. She could see her reading accounts in to-morrow's newspapers. Well, mused Jessup, it was too bad that Ivan's mother should have been destined for so grievous a disappointment as the result of the marriage of her son. And so, as Jessup thought of her strenuous interview, she regretted nothing that she had said. The least she could do as a parting gift was to confirm Mrs. Banning's belief that her daughter-in-law was the biggest liar in the world.

Through the brownish air of the dry, January day, Jessup started for the dock. Her car was loaded with new steamer-trunks, bags, hat-boxes, and portfolios. Beside Jessup sat Nordahl, who, although he was still the busiest man on Broadway, had contrived to snatch an hour to see her off on her voyage.

"It's fine of you to come down to the ship with me," Jessup was saying.

The director talked in the tense, nervous monotone that characterized all his utterances. "You're going to like it over there. I know. I've been across eight times. They've got a lot of things that we haven't got. But they're slow. My God, they're slow. Slow as the itch. I couldn't work over there. I'd go mad. I'd be a nut in no time."

"Yes, I dare say," smiled Jessup. "I never saw anyone like you to keep people humping."

"That's it exactly. They've got to hump. Or else they've got to get out. I can't work with drones. They've got to keep moving. I've got to see results. That's what I like about you. You move. You get somewhere. My God, how you used to dance for me. I could see there was something in you. But it wasn't dancing. You were all right. But you didn't belong back of the lights. Then I saw some of your sketches. Right away I knew what you ought to be doing. I told you. You did what I said. You began to study. You made good. You're going right straight to the top. I know. Nothing can stop you now."

Jessup's stateroom was piled with flowers, steamer-baskets, steamer-boxes, telegrams, and other tokens of farewell. Salant had sent an enormous box of roses. Doris Banning had sent fruit and candy. But of all the people on Broadway and elsewhere in whose lives Jessup had figured, only Nordahl had found it convenient to be on hand. Nordahl had been the first to show her any kindness during her early struggles in

New York; he had taken time to go to her wedding; and here he was once more, after all the others had appeared and vanished. He had never made a sentimental nuisance of himself, never had pried into her affairs. Even now he did not ask why Banning was not here.

"All visitors ashore!" called the deck stewards.

"Good-by, Miss Jessup. God bless you," said Nordahl. Then he kissed her hand and started rapidly away.

Jessup waved to him as he hurried down the gang-plank to race back to his rehearsals. She would never forget his eyes, his impersonal devotion, his unfailing loyalty at times when she needed him.

Standing at the rail of the ship, luxuriously shielded by her sable coat, Jessup watched the Jersey ferries, and contrasted her arrival in New York with her exit. She recalled the immigrant woman holding a baby tightly in her arms. She recalled the alarming beauty of New York looming before her, the unforgettable chant of its inscrutable towers and spires, the incredible façades that seemed to talk to her in unintelligible whisperings. As she gazed again at the rhythmic immensity of the skyline, she reflected that she had fathomed some of its secrets and had finally been able to peer with keener sight into the cloudy depths of her own soul.

The great oil-burner was moving down through the harbor without a throb from her enormous engines, and soon a sweep of cold air struck her decks from the

steel-blue waters of the North Atlantic. The steeples and skyscrapers receded into soft and tenuous outlines. Fewer ships were in sight, and Ambrose Lightship was discovered plunging violently at anchor. Jessup did not know what it was, but as she watched it, the lurching craft reminded her of herself, plunging and rearing and straining at her fate.

She went below and sank into a huge chair in the lounge. Luncheon was announced, but she did not stir. She was watching the passengers as they came and went, wondering about them, speculating as to their lives. She picked out some who she thought were doubtlessly important figures in New York, the playground of genius.

Among them she discovered a familiar figure. He entered the lounge with a stiff and forbidding stride. His long, slender cheeks, his stern mouth, and frigid eyes were features that she had not forgotten. Those eyes had recently bent pondering glances at some of the sketches in her exhibition. A feeling of diffidence and dismay had overwhelmed her, and she had begged him not to look at any more of her work. He had told her that she had talent, had deigned to criticize, and she had listened hungrily to his judgment.

The eminent artist came toward her. Jessup felt the same inexplicable agitation that she had felt in his presence before. Now she was in the path of his glance and for a fraction of a second his glance rested upon her. But he strode past without speaking. He did not remember her.

Jessup saw him again from time to time, gravely

pacing the deck, apparently lost in contemplation. As she lay in her deck-chair, wrapped in steamer rugs, she would watch him approach and pass. Once, when he looked at her, she was on the point of speaking to him and recalling their meeting at the gallery; but in his eyes was a look of such distance and detachment that it seemed almost an affront to break in upon the privacy of his pondering.

He was the only passenger on board who interested her particularly. She had seen numerous portraits from his brush; she remembered some of them in surprising detail; and these distinguished portraits kept revolving in continuous procession through her mind. Her own sketches seemed trivial compared with the solid depths and gorgeous surfaces of his paintings. It seemed good to be a passenger on the same ship with him.

She would watch for him to come round the bend of the promenade deck, but so unobtrusively did she watch for him that he was in no wise aware of it. Jessup noticed that like herself he was alone during most of the journey. As she studied the remoteness and self-sufficiency of the taciturn figure, loneliness assumed a fascinating dignity in her eyes, and it came to her that she would never again dread being alone.

When the ship had docked at Cherbourg, and the passengers were going ashore, Jessup caught a final glimpse of him. Again his brooding eyes rested for a moment upon her, and Jessup, obeying a sudden impulse, waved him a smiling good-by. The other bowed gravely, but Jessup knew that he did not remember her.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014776898